THE FLEET'S IN!

RUSSELL HOLMAN

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THE FLEET'S IN!

A Paramount Picture. *The Fleet's In.*

CLARA BOW AS PEACHY DEANE, THE SAILORS' DANCE HALL SWEETHEART.

THE FLEET'S IN!

NOVELIZED BY

RUSSELL HOLMAN

BASED UPON THE MOTION PICTURE
STARRING

CLARA BOW

A PARAMOUNT PICTURE

ILLUSTRATED WITH
SCENES FROM THE PHOTOPLAY

GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

PS
3515
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1928

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To

WINIFRED

FOREWORD

By Clara Bow

I LOVE to dance.

The more modern the dance, the more I enjoy it. The old fashioned dances, with the costumes of frills and ruffles and their slow, stately tempo, may have been fine in their own day and age. But they are not for our fast, colorful, crowded times. For one thing, there is simply not room enough on dance floors to execute them.

I like sailors.

They are healthy and sun-bronzed and there is something about the look in their eyes suggesting turbulent open seas and strange sights in strange lands. They are frank and direct in their talk. They are unspoiled. There is an air of youthful romance about them.

These are two of many reasons why I like "The Fleet's In!"

I hope you get as much kick out of the picture and book as I did.

It is exactly the kind of a rôle I love to play on the screen. It is modern youth, laughing, dancing, loving. With an under-current of pathos and near-tragedy too.

I have been called the "Queen of the Flappers." If by flapper is meant the girl of today, I am proud to be

called one. I prefer flappers to their sisters of the past. People who decry the modern girl do so because they do not understand her. Her skirts are shorter, her stockings are of sheerest silk, she is frank in her speech and in her enjoyment of the gayeties of life. She uses powder and rouge, but in this she is not introducing something new. The grand ladies of the Court of Louis XIV, I understand, used paint far more freely and far less cleverly than do girls today.

Because they regard life more fearlessly and strip it of its bunk in their talk and actions, I believe modern girls are better companions, truer friends and more valuable citizens than the girls of another day. Modern girls make better wives because they look at men with no illusions. They do not fall in love with the first man who smiles at them and talks to them with pretty words. They can analyze. They have minds of their own when it comes to love as well as the other things in life. They don't weep or faint or run for the nearest cyclone cellar when trouble comes.

I get nearly 35,000 letters a month. A large part of them are from girls of my own age and girls who, like myself, work for a living. Many of the letters ask me for advice, often about love. It is embarrassing. I am no authority on love. I am no philosopher. It is pathetic, too. So many girls in the world worried about love! All I can say is:

Be a good sport in love as well as in everything else. Give men a clean, fifty-fifty break and expect the same from them.

"The Fleet's In" is intended to be entertainment only. But still it preaches a little sermon about the modern girl and love. It says to her:

Never be too confident that you can fall in and out of love as you choose.

Never think that you can flirt and be provocative and then call a halt whenever you feel like it.

Never sell affection in return for favors.

Never take it for granted a man feels the same way about you as you do about him. Make him prove it!

"The Fleet's In" has this to say to men:

No man, no matter how good looking and attractive, is necessarily fatal to *all* women. Even Don Juan probably had some flops to mar his record.

Never make the most dangerous of all generalizations, which is: "All women are—." The truth is, each woman is different.

I hope you'll like Peachy, the heroine of "The Fleet's In!" And Eddie, the hero, too. They're so young and foolish-wise and eager. I like them. I trust you'll learn something from them, too I did.

See you on the screen!

Clara Bow

THE FLEET'S IN!

CHAPTER I

PEACHY DEANE was not always the red-topped stick of dynamite that burst upon a delighted nautical world the day that the fleet came in.

Indeed there was a time, not so long before that, when she was not even known as Peachy.

Go back, for instance, to that gray pre-Peachy morning when, still Lucy Deane, she was doffing her hat and coat and doing a little facial repair work in the lady clerks' dressing room preliminary to assuming her duties behind the ribbon counter of Schwarz' Department Store. Even loyal San Franciscans admitted it was a bad morning. Not raining, of course, but, yes, a very heavy dew. One you warded off with umbrellas.

An especially gray morning for Lucy Deane. Not a matter of dew with her, but of due. When pretty, red headed, vivacious Lucy reported for work glum, blue and lifeless, as she was that morning, there was pretty apt to be something very serious the matter. There was.

"We can save your eyes, Mrs. Deane, but you will

have to avoid using them as much as possible," the expensive eye specialist with the pointed gray beard and pince-nez glasses had told her mother the previous evening. "You will, of course, have to give up this sewing you have been doing. It is a constant strain. It would eventually lead to blindness."

Five minutes later, having left a substantial fee, they departed from his office. Mrs. Deane was left with an almost empty pocketbook in one hand and a prescription in the other. When they were once again in their own living room, she stared blankly at Lucy.

"Of course I can't give up the sewing," the elderly woman said resignedly. "We need the money too badly."

"You must, mother," Lucy replied, snuggling up to her and throwing a protective arm around her. "We can live on what I make at the store."

"You need most of that for yourself," said Mrs. Deane. "You're a growing girl, a pretty girl. You should have nice clothes and other things. They all seem to cost so much money these days."

"We could move into a cheaper place," her daughter suggested.

Mrs. Deane made a discouraged gesture with her tired arm that encompassed the two small rooms which they occupied in the rear of a drab apartment house. Rooms which, with all of the mother's natural aptitude for making living conditions cheerful and bright, remained gloomy and dull.

"We couldn't stand much worse than this," sighed the older woman. Then she straightened her shoulders and said as cheerfully as possible, "Well, no use of worrying any more about it tonight. It's time for bed. We'll talk about it tomorrow."

Neither slept very much. Lucy lay wide-eyed and thoughtful. The major tragedy was, naturally, that the sight of her mother's eyes, affected by long devotion to the professional sewing that had provided them with their chief income since the death of the husband and father, was, as they had feared, definitely threatened. It brought trouble of a financial nature in its wake. Lucy's meager salary as a shop girl at Schwarz' was hardly enough to keep them going. There were times when it was hard to make ends meet.

Well, she would have to do something about it, Lucy decided at once. She was young and strong. She could take on some extra work. Nights, for instance. But what? There were no over-time opportunities at Schwarz', except at Christmas season, and that was many months away. Where could she find a chance to earn more? Finally, near daybreak, she fell into a troubled slumber, no nearer a solution than when she had sought her pillow.

That morning the other girl clerks at Schwarz', engaged like herself in the dressing room before the start of the day's toil, noticed her unusual quietness and serious mien.

"What's the matter, Lucy?" chubby, good natured Grace McCann asked. "You look as if you had been

dragged behind a fire engine all night. Big party or something?"

Lucy did not answer.

Then pert, strawberry blonde Ethel Dobbs breezed in, at the last minute as usual, and the girls forgot Lucy and her evident trouble to cluster around Ethel and learn of her latest escapade.

Ethel worked with Lucy behind the ribbon counter. They were friends of a sort during working hours. But when the store closed for the day, Ethel invaded a different and gayer world, of which her fellow toilers in Schwarz' never tired of hearing her tell. Ethel reigned evenings as the most popular hostess at Gladland, San Francisco's big public dance hall.

Men were Ethel's chief forte and her leading topic of conversation, whether they were the roving-eyed males who wandered about Schwarz' and cast inviting glances at the prettiest of the sales girls or the equally provocative chaps who engaged her to fox trot with them at Gladland at a dime a dance, Ethel receiving a nickel for her share. Even young Myron Schwarz, son of the proprietor of the store, was conscious of the rosy, lavishly exhibited charm of Ethel. He had taken her to dinner and the show only two evenings before. Sworn to secrecy, Ethel had revealed this to only ten sales girls.

"Well, here I am again, girls," Ethel greeted them gayly. "Right on time and bright as a button, though these baby blue eyes only closed for two fleeting hours of slumber this morning."

"What was the racket last night, dearie?" one of the girls asked.

"Group of high powered bankers from New York blew into Gladland about eleven," Ethel explained. "Kiernan asked me to round up three of our leading cuties and take care of the boys. I did. Service, that's my middle name. After we closed up Gladland, the money men still weren't tired and invited us to their hotel for a little private dance. Sure we went. All left at five o'clock with twenty bucks apiece in our jeans. Ho-hum, such is life."

Ethel yawned and then started languidly removing her hat.

Lucy listened with the rest. Why did some girls have all the luck? Surely she herself was as pretty and attractive to men as too blonde and rather addle-pated little Ethel. To be sure, she couldn't probably be as free and easy with men as her counter mate. But Lucy was no prude. And she was wise enough to know how to handle herself.

A gong sounded in the dressing room. The girls took last looks in the mirrors, dabbed powder puffs hastily, put away their outer street attire and filed out into the store to assume their posts.

Fifteen minutes later, their stock arranged for the day, Lucy and Ethel stood idly behind their counter awaiting their first customers.

Dark haired, dapper Myron Schwarz, a small button-eyed bachelor of thirty, passed through on his morning tour of inspection. His eye met Ethel's, his head

nodded slightly and she unobtrusively moved down to the far end of the counter. With a quick look around to see that he was unobserved, Schwarz bent down and whispered intimately to her for a few minutes, at the same time pointing to the rolls of ribbon in front of him as if their discussion was about business.

When he had disappeared briskly down the aisle, Ethel returned to her position near Lucy. She was smiling wisely.

"He kinda likes me," explained Ethel. "Nice fellow too. Plenty of jack."

Lucy stood silently. She was thinking about her own troubles. Apparently she had not noticed Ethel's tête-à-tête.

Suddenly she asked, "How do you get all these men to fall for you, Ethel?"

Ethel stared at her and gave a short laugh.

"Why, little girl," she said mockingly. "I didn't know you cared." She became more serious. "What's the idea of you asking me that? A pretty girl like you has men of her own, haven't you?"

"Yes," Lucy acknowledged. "But they're just boys. I mean older, rich men. Men who take you riding in expensive cars and make you presents all the time. Where do you meet them and how do you work it?"

Ethel saw that Lucy was really interested. It pleased Ethel, who never tired of talking about her favorite subjects, herself and men.

"Well, you see," she started, "I meet most of them

up to the dance hall. You'd be surprised the number of real classy, wealthy fellows who drop in there. And then, of course, one thing leads to another. I meet one man and he introduces me to his friends. We go out on parties. I'm nice to them all and show them a good time. They appreciate it. The presents just come along naturally after that."

Lucy lowered her flaming red head and piquant peaches-and-cream face in study for a minute. She made up her mind.

"Ethel," she said gravely, "how does a girl go about getting a job up at Gladland? It's good pay, isn't it?"

Ethel regarded her curiously. Now that she came to consider it, Lucy was a pretty swell looking kid. A good kid, too. Her complexion and her eyes went fine with that red head. Nice figure too. Kiernan would fall for her.

"With luck, we hostesses do pretty well," Ethel said slowly. "We get a nickel out of every ten cent ticket. But of course if you're good, the men hand you more than one ticket a dance. I seldom get as few as three. Say, did you have it in mind to be a hostess?"

"I have to do something," Lucy said soberly. "My mother can't work any more and I don't make enough to support us both. I've got to find something extra to do."

"Can you dance?"

"I love it."

Ethel shook her head.

"I don't know whether you could stand it or not."

she objected. "You get some pretty tough customers thrown at you. You have to think fast in handling them. And, of course, the work in general isn't what a nice home girl would care for. Men's arms around you all evening, holding you as tightly as they think they can get away with, most of them. Making fresh remarks. All kinds of men. And you have to be on your feet all the time. After a hard day here, it's awful sometimes. And no matter how you feel, you got to act pleasant and smiling. Think you'd like it?"

"If there's money in it, I'd like it," Lucy said grimly.

Ethel took her by the arm.

"All right, kid," she said generously. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I like you. You're pretty and you've got brains. And I enjoy having you around better when you're your usual cheery, wise-cracking self than I do when you're glum like you are today. If it will cheer you up, after work I'll take you up and introduce you to Jake Kiernan, the big boss at Gladland. After that it's up to you. O.K.?"

Lucy started to pour out her thanks, but Ethel was already on her way up the counter to wait upon a sour-faced lady who was inspecting baby-blue ribbon through a lorgnette. The first customer of the day.

They boarded a crowded electric car in front of the store at six o'clock that evening and clung to straps side by side.

"Kiernan ought to be there," Ethel reassured her somewhat nervous companion. "He comes to work

about this time. Talk right up to him. He likes girls peppy. And work your s.a. ail you can. Flash those blue lamps and give him a good look at that mop of carrot hair. That ought to land him."

Fifteen minutes later Ethel, with Lucy by her side, was breezing into the sprawly building that was Gladland as if she owned it. The man at the door rescued the toothpick from the corner of his mouth and tipped a brown derby to her. Yes, Kiernan was in his office.

The office was a cubby-hole just to the left of the entrance door. A room littered with newspapers and discarded tinsel favors and stacks of sheet music. It was in striking contrast to the clean, bright, flashy part of the dance hall given over to the customers. The principal article of furniture in Kiernan's office was a battered and scratched oaken flat topped desk covered with papers. By the scowl on the face of the lantern-jawed man in his shirt sleeves occupying the swivel chair behind the desk, the papers were bills. Kiernan raised his head and shifted the unlighted black cigar in his mouth as the girls entered.

"Hello, Ethel," he said in a husky bass.

His eyes shifted to Lucy and traveled boldly from her head to her toes, as if he were inspecting an animal that he was thinking of purchasing. His face was expressionless as he turned to Ethel.

"Greetings, Jake," Ethel said blithely. "How's business?"

"Rotten," he croaked. "You hostesses have the right graft. You get all the money and none of the grief."

"Is that so?" she retorted. "Get out there and dance with some of those bums if you think so." She slid into the battered chair near his desk and laid a confidential hand on his arm. "I've come to do you a favor. First I want to introduce you to Lucy Deane. Lucy—meet Jake Kiernan, a good scout——"

Lucy smiled warmly as if she were indeed very pleased to meet Mr. Kiernan. Dimples danced in her cheeks. Her blue eyes shone in friendly fashion. Gee, he thought, she's a swell looker. Prettier even than Ethel. He kept his eyes on the new girl as Ethel rambled on.

"—I've persuaded Lucy that she ought to do you the favor of coming up here and taking a job as hostess. She's a good looker, as you can see. And she's a whizz of a dancer. Danced in New York with the Prince of Wales. She was his favorite. Holds a lot of cups for winning dancing contests. Has swell clothes and knows how to be nice to the men"

"Is she a *good* girl?" boomed Jake bluntly. "I take only girls with nice reputations."

"Oh, Jacob, how could you ask?" Ethel rolled her eyes heaven-ward. "Isn't she a friend of *mine?*"

He untangled himself from his chair and stood up to give Lucy another minute inspection. She did not mind. She was used to having men look at her. Her slim body in its thin, rather skimpy but attractive attire

was gracefully outlined. She was glad she had worn her best sheer silk stockings to work that morning.

"All right, Peaches and Cream, we'll take a chance with you," said Kiernan matter-of-factly. He threw at Ethel, "McNeill quit last night. Some bird got fresh with her and she pasted him. I can't stand for that. The customer is always right. She left. I need another girl. I'll take your friend. You put her wise to things."

Lucy held out her hand gratefully to the dance hall man. Instead of taking it, he gruffly asked her for her name and address and scratched it into a dog-eared note book.

"Thanks awfully, Mr. Kiernan," Lucy cried sincerely. "You don't know what this means to me."

"Start in tonight, Peachy?" he asked. "I need you right away."

Lucy hesitated. She should really have secured her mother's permission before even thinking about this job. But, on second thought, it might be better to plunge right into it and then inform her mother. She was sure the latter would raise objections if she knew about it in advance.

Ethel settled it for her.

"Sure she can start tonight," she assured him. She added in an undertone to Lucy, "If you're worried about your mother, tell her you're going to a party with me. Bring your evening gown over to my apartment and we can both dress there."

Thus it was finally arranged.

Ethel occupied a three room apartment on Sutter Street far more pretentious than one would expect of a girl employed behind the counter at Schwarz'. The lavishness of its furnishings fairly bowled Lucy over. The fact that none of the furnishings seemed to match, that very few of them bore the marks of Ethel's own selection, convinced her companion that they were practically all presents from men. Ethel complacently confirmed this.

"Take everything and give just enough—that's my motto," explained the veteran hostess. "Men are easy to handle, once you understand them. Throw them a smile once in a while and kid them along, and they'll come through with almost anything. You'll learn, Peachy. You're a smart kid. Say—that's a good name for you—Peachy. I guess he called you that on account of your peaches and cream complexion. It's a hunch. Keep it. Forget the Lucy stuff. Tell the boys your name is Peachy. See?"

Peachy, from the depths of a scanty black evening gown which she was slipping over her scarcely clad white loveliness, nodded, smiling.

Peachy from that moment she became. Most of the men, and women too, who came in contact with her thereafter never even learned her correct first name.

From that very first night, when she learned the duties of a dance hall hostess from the experienced and sympathetic Ethel, Peachy was an instant success in her new profession.

During the first two weeks she looked forward to

her evening sessions at Gladland as thrilling contrasts to her rather monotonous daily toil at Schwarz'. At first she thoroughly enjoyed dancing to the excellent music of Gladland's expensive orchestra. For the most part she did not mind the men. Many of them were nice and good looking. If she happened to draw one who danced badly or was frankly amorous in his intentions, there was always the consolation that the dances were short and she could quickly be rid of him. Always leaving him with a smile, of course.

She learned how to dispense a bright, continuous line of conversation, a monologue if necessary, that meant nothing but seemed to amuse her partners. She fenced with and disposed of all male talk that asked intimate questions about herself, her address, her telephone number. She declined scores of requests nightly for her company after the dance hall closed. Whispered invitations to private parties, offers to take her home.

Peachy Deane quickly became one of the favorites of Gladland. Men avidly sought her as a partner, tempted her with extra tickets, fought over her a little. She developed a coterie of customers who asked her again and again for dances and came back night after night. Kiernan was pleased. It meant money in the till. Peachy was delighted also. There was no longer the problem of the rent and how it was to be paid. With her Gladland revenue added to her wages at the department store, she could provide amply for both herself and her mother.

She even began to consider moving, with Mrs.

Deane, into a better apartment. She bought her mother and herself more expensive clothes than either had ever owned before.

Subtly, gradually, Gladland began to work a change in her. She became a student of men, their whims and eccentricities. She almost unconsciously began to classify men into types and to devise ways of handling them all. She developed a very sophisticated, rather cynical philosophy regarding the opposite sex. It was based upon Ethel's motto, "Take everything and give just enough."

At the same time she studied herself and particularly her outward appearance. She dressed so as to accentuate the full appeal of her fresh, youthful charm. She clothed her slim, straight body in a rather costly style that did it full justice, that paid. She submitted her gorgeous red hair to the deft fingers of an expert hairdresser. She was careful in her selection of exactly the right shoes and stockings.

One day, after Peachy had been a hostess at Gladland for about seven months, Ethel took advantage of the early morning lull behind the ribbon counter to display to Peachy privately a large and sparkling engagement ring.

"Wonderful, Ethel!" Peachy cried. "Who's the lucky man?"

"You'd never guess," Ethel giggled. "So I'll tell you. It's none other than Myron F. Schwarz himself, in person."

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THE FLEET'S IN! AND THE DANCE HALL GIRLS ARE ON DECK TO MEET THE BOYS.

"Heavenly!" said Peachy. "When does the happy event take place?"

"Tomorrow. No more ribbon counter for me. And no more Gladland. You'll be on your own up there, kiddo. Think you can manage?"

Peachy nodded affirmatively. "I think so," she said.

She was too modest. Already she knew more about the business of being a hostess and the care and handling of the male sex than Ethel herself. She was wiser than any good girl of nineteen years has any right to be.

CHAPTER II

She was a bright spark of femininity as she walked briskly up Market Street in the clear sunlight of a San Francisco mid-afternoon.

Masculine eyes swung to her as to a magnet, some with covert approval, others with frank and inviting audacity. Masculine heads turned back for second glances after they had passed her. Even women pedestrians granted her grudging approbation.

With good reason. She was small. But so was Napoleon. Her bobbed hair under the tight little hat was auburn. Her eyes were big and blue and clear and innocent-wise. Cheeks and lips were full and red, the coloring without the aid of a chemist. Her thin flowered chiffon shirtwaist, cut low on her creamy neck, concealed and revealed at the same time. The skirt, of the same material, was very short. The legs, encased in sheer silk stockings, were masterpieces. Small feet twinkled on the hot sidewalk in new, tricky shoes with very high heels.

She was an extremely pretty girl of about twenty years, well made and well attired in the modern manner. She was more. She was quite obviously a personality. She radiated vitality. She had oodles of "it."

And she was not unconscious of all this. She knew

people, particularly men, were looking at her. She was used to it. It was her principal stock in trade. She had developed a system for handling it. If her passing masculine admirers were old and unattractive, she walked briskly and demurely on, eyes front. If they were young and good looking, she permitted her bright blue eyes to glance over from under the hat and calmly return their approving appraisal, the suspicion of a smile playing about the corners of her bee-stung lips.

It seemed odd that such a glowing girl should be walking in the hot sun, what with scores of motors swinging up and down Market Street almost within reach of her smooth, rounded arms and what with all the vaunted San Francisco hospitality.

As if to leap to the city's defense, a long, low and shiny roadster darted out of the passing uptown throng of traffic and nosed in toward the curb. The alert eyes of the red-headed girl had sighted it even before it stopped and recognized the tall, dark-haired youth sprawled behind the wheel. She quickly crossed the sidewalk. She smiled warmly.

"Ride, Peachy?" the youth drawled.

She nodded and stepped up and slid into the low seat beside him. He shifted gears and glided back into the traffic.

"Going any place in particular?" he asked genially, turning a too-sophisticated and rather tired face toward her.

"Turn up Post Street. I'm on my way to Gladland.

You're an angel for happening along, Bob. It's hot walking."

She took off her hat and placed it carefully in her lap. The sun glinted upon her titian locks as she shook them into order. Her voice was low, almost husky. It had warmth and vivacity. It dressed her simplest statements with sincerity and importance, even when the statements were both false and trivial. She had discovered that men liked this. She had, in fact, made a very careful study of men's likes and dislikes. She needed the knowledge in her business.

"Why this sudden devotion to duty?" mildly protested the young man at the wheel. "You're not due at Gladland until eight, are you?"

"Special occasion," she flung at him.

Her piquant face was tilted backward. She was warm. She was gratefully enjoying the breeze stirred up by the open roadster. Only ten minutes before she had dashed from behind the ribbon counter of a stuffy department store. She had been forced to feign illness to a suspicious floor manager in order to get away. It had been very fatiguing. She had looked altogether too healthy to him, even with the paling effect of the powder which she had borrowed and rubbed thickly on her rosy cheeks to bear out her plea of sudden indisposition. Even as he had reluctantly allowed her to leave, his jaundiced eyes had looked disbelief. Perhaps she would return in the morning to discover she had lost her job. That would be a catastrophe.

It was a wretched job, but Peachy needed the money.

She had two mouths to feed, her own and her mother's. Peachy was the sole provider. And there was the new and rather expensive apartment into which they had just moved. And all the pretty things she wanted to buy. True, she did not always have to use her own money for pretty things. Usually they just seemed to gravitate to her. A smile, a few carefully selected words, the right man, and there the pretty things were!

Bob Steele, for instance. Men were so easy. Even when they became aggressive and troublesome. Bob had seemingly passed through the hectic stage. He had discovered, like many men, the cold-as-ice, shrewd Peachy that lurked beneath the outside inviting warmth. He was man of the world enough to accept it, to resign himself to it, to enjoy her company anyway, to admire her for her smartness. Other men took it harder at the showdown. Some clawed and swore and got very messy. And finally they went away, muttering about "gold diggers." She could handle that kind too. She could handle all men, she told herself. When she took the job at Gladland, she had gone there with that carefully prepared, very hard little philosophy about men. Learned from Ethel.

Just now she was worrying neither about men nor her job nor anything. She had a happy habit of enjoying the pleasure of the moment. Just now the pleasure was fresh air and a ride in a smooth, fast moving car.

"Why don't you chuck Gladland and come along

with me?" Bob suddenly asked. "Going to a swell party down at Los Gatos. Back about midnight. Moonlight and all that. You always did work best in the moonlight, Peachy."

"Sorry. I'd love it. Especially the moonlight," she replied, as if she meant it. "But Kiernan has called us all for four o'clock. The fleet's due in this afternoon and I imagine we have to go down and meet the brave boys in blue. Publicity stunt or something."

Bob glanced over at her and emitted a dry chuckle.

"Imagine—wasting you on a bunch of gobs," he said.

"Thank you for the doubtful compliment, kind sir," she mocked. "But ladies must live. Gobs are customers. Their dimes are as good as yours, even though they don't go riding around in great big fire engines like this 'bus of yours."

Bob glanced at his wrist.

"You're due at Gladland at four. It's three thirty now," he suggested. "Care to dash through the park for a cool-off and back by the way of the Bay road? Guarantee to deliver you safe and sound on time."

"O.K.," she agreed promptly and squirmed down further into the seat. "It's warm and I get an awful kick out of riding in this ball of fire of yours, Bob."

The man behind the wheel concentrated upon his driving, at which he was an expert. The car purred on, swiftly, smoothly. Steele whipped it to the left across the crowded traffic of Market Street and out toward Golden Gate Park. Now and then he glanced

almost stealthfully at the pretty girl alongside him settled so low in the seat that she was almost lying down. Her auburn locks were blowing around her cheeks in the breeze stirred up by the fast moving roadster. Her eyes were half closed. She was thoroughly relaxed and happy, contented that he did not talk to her.

To Bob Steele she was, for almost the first time since he had met her, definitely disturbing. Which was amazing, for women, or anything else, did not usually disturb Bob Steele.

He was the only son of a wealthy and doting mother with whom he lived during the short and widely spread intervals when she was not traveling abroad or visiting scattered hordes of relatives throughout the United States. Born in San Francisco, he had been taken abroad before he could walk. Attaining his 'teens in London, he had been educated in France and Germany. He had spent winters at St. Moritz and on the Riviera. He lived for so many years in hotels that at one time he did not recall what a regular home looked like. Then, a year previous, his mother and he had returned home on what was to be a flying visit to San Francisco. He had rediscovered the city of his birth and decided in his blasé way that he liked it. To the chagrin of his mother, who rather enjoyed showing off her handsome son, so obviously a man of the world and at home in any company, he had announced that he would remain in the Bay City as long as it did not bore him and that in the meantime she would have to do her traveling alone. She had consented. She was very

much like her son. Nothing ever disturbed her.

At twenty-five he was a thorough cosmopolitan. He had experienced practically every emotion or thrill, he fancied. He had met all the girls of his own class and did not particularly care for them, though women as a sex interested him. He wandered further afield in his search for adventure. One night he invaded the Gladland Dance Hall, alone, expecting to spend an uninteresting five minutes and leave. The fresh, inviting face of a red headed hostess flashed across his jaded eyes. She attracted him. She was so vibrant with personality, so vital. He danced with her.

He had expected disappointment. Probably beneath the piquant face and form he would discover the same crude, insipid personality characteristic of her class. He had been surprised, shocked out of his complacency, to find her wise, clever and not a little baffling. She was in her way as sophisticated and blasé as himself. When he told her his name, his right name, she recalled seeing his picture in the society columns of the newspapers. It did not intrigue her.

He danced with her three times running. He invited her to luncheon the next day and she accepted matter-of-factly. It was the beginning of a peculiar relationship. He introduced her to a set of rich, pleasure-seeking youths and young women like himself. They accepted her without question, almost without apparently noticing her. Once a fortnight or so he called her up and invited her to dinner or a ride in his

car. On three or four occasions she had joined a party of his friends as his companion on a one-day junket to the beach or a dance at the St. Francis. Usually, however, he preferred to be alone with her.

On these occasions he was content to look at her with his tired, prematurely old eyes, blow cigarette smoke into the air and bask in her refreshing chatter. She was so delightfully sure of herself, so radiant with youth and optimism. Yet, though he had never questioned her about her home life, probably as poor as a church mouse and living in the drabbest of environments.

So far not a word or gesture of an intimate nature had ever passed between them. Bob Steele had long ceased making love to women. He thought he was cured forever. He was conscious of the beauty and physical appeal of this dance hall girl. He knew that men looked toward her when he escorted her into public places. It gratified his vanity. He knew also that she was quite aware of the allure which her exquisitely formed body exuded and did not particularly resent admiration.

Lately, however, Bob Steele had become vaguely conscious that he was less sure of himself with her. He had taken her for a ride in the moonlight, up over the Twin Peaks and along the Bay, a short ride on a night made for the gods. He had suddenly looked at her pretty peaches-and-cream face bathed in moonbeams and something had clutched at him that made

him want to put his hands on her, to kiss her, to crush her to him. He had not yielded. But it had been tremendously disturbing.

Now he had unexpectedly met her on Market Street. At first he had made the decision to pass by quickly and pay no attention to her. It was the wise thing to do, he had told himself, if he did not want to lose her friendship. For obviously no reciprocal longing for him had seized her on that moonlight drive. She had been as serene as ever, unaware that anything untoward was disturbing his usual calm.

Bob Steele had discovered that he could not ride past her. Something almost outside of himself had guided the car to the curb. When she had promptly crawled in beside him, he had experienced an agitation of the senses that was as pleasant as it was extraordinary. His greeting and subsequent conversation had been casual, but he was quite sure that his blood pressure was far from normal. It was a novel and exhilarating experience. He desired intensely to carry it to its conclusion, whatever it might be. He did not want to go direct to Gladland and leave her. He had proposed the ride in the Park. Not in a million years could she have suspected how joyfully he received her acceptance.

"Why the Sphynx stuff, Bob?" she asked blandly. "Where's your ready tongue?"

"Too hot to talk," he answered.

"Too lazy, you mean," she retorted.

Still he would not rise to the verbal bait. They

swung out of the Park into a winding, up-hill-and-down-dale road stretching along the bright waters of the Bay. The air here was fresher, brisker, with a faint salty tang. The car plunged ahead for another five minutes and then in a deserted stretch of the road he slowed down, eased under a towering tree and stopped. He switched off the engine and turned to her. His face was strangely animated. There was a faint flush in his sallow cheeks and his sleepy eyes were now wide awake. There was even a sign of quivering about his lips. She turned lazily to him and saw that there was something different about him. She suspected nothing. She thought she knew Bob Steele like a book.

"You know," he said almost with embarrassment, "you're an extremely pretty girl. But, of course, you *do* know it."

"*You* never told me so before," she smiled. "What's eating you, Bob?"

"Nothing," he said shortly.

"Let's go on then," she suggested. "I really have to be at Gladland on time. Kiernan will rave if I'm not."

"Oh, let him!" he said so fiercely that she was annoyed. She looked at him with a start.

"Why the stop and the compliment, Bob?" she asked. "It isn't like you at all."

"Why?" he trembled in an unnatural voice. "Why? Why—this!"

And without warning he caught her in his arms and

kissed her almost cruelly on the lips. Almost immediately he released her. There was a strange and wondering look in his eyes. His act had been almost without his own volition.

CHAPTER III

The girl regarded him gravely, silently. Finally she spoke.

"Well, that's that," she said. "Now let's go."

"I'm sorry, Peachy," he almost begged. "I don't know what the hell hit me. Are you sore?"

She considered this briefly.

"No," she gave him her judgment, "I'm not angry. It's just too bad. I thought you were the one man in the world who wouldn't try to do that. That's why I've liked you and gone around with you. Now, of course, it's all over."

"Why?" he asked eagerly.

"Because I don't want *you* getting silly and thinking you're in love with me. Because you're not, and never will be. You're not the type, Bob. You're too selfish. I'm not the slightest bit in love with you. I'm not the type either. We were such good pals, and now it's smashed, fini."

He seemed about to interject a protest, but she stilled him with a gesture.

"No," she said. "Let's just forget it."

"But other men must have tried to do this before," he said.

"They have," she agreed. "Some of them have suc-

ceeded. Kisses usually mean nothing in particular. This happens to be a rather significant kiss, as I understand it. It is intended to be the beginning of something that I don't particularly care to undertake. You don't love me and I don't love you. I don't want to be kissed that way except when there's a real affection between me and the man who kisses me."

He sighed. He pressed the starter and the engine of the powerful roadster renewed its rhythmic purring. They slid out from their rendezvous into the road. He shot the gas into the car and it gained speed. He talked to her with his eyes straight ahead searching the road.

"You're a pretty cold blooded proposition, aren't you, girl friend?" he inquired in his drawling normal tones.

"Pretty much," she admitted. "I have to be in my business. You've been studying me and taking me apart to see what makes me tick for months, Bob, and I really thought you understood me. It's a fifty-fifty proposition between men and me. I dance with them and I'm nice to them and I make a living out of it. They get their money's worth. I'm like an actress on the stage. During business hours I'm selling my youth and beauty, but outside of that I want to forget it. I don't want to fall in love or do anything foolish like that, and I don't want anybody to think they're in love with me."

"You may change your mind some day," he hinted.

"Sure," she said readily. "But not today."

They were spinning down teeming Mission Street now, in the heart of the city. Bob Steele's feelings seemed to have returned to normalcy. He was sprawled in the driver's seat, eyes half closed, a cigarette hanging in the corner of his thin mouth.

"I'll see you again soon?" he suggested hopefully.

"No," she said. "I don't think you'd better. You're a good looking chap, Bob, with oodles of money. I might not be able to resist you."

"Don't rub it in," he commented without resentment.

"When I fall," she mused almost to herself, "it will probably be for a rough, simple hearted man without a nickel. And he'll probably sweep me off my feet. That's what usually happens to girls who think they are smart, isn't it?"

"So I understand," he bandied with her. "But I wouldn't know about that."

"The time, please," she asked.

He glanced at his wrist.

"Four o'clock to the dot."

"Five minutes late. Not bad."

They had turned into Post Street and were climbing steadily. A few turns around side streets and Bob drew the slim car against the curb in front of a large, square two-storied auditorium. The big building looked cold and deserted.

"Sure you won't go partying with me instead?" he

asked languidly, though he knew it was hopeless. There was always such an air of finality about Peachy's "no's."

"Can't," she replied, alighting gracefully from the car and standing smiling beside it. "Thanks for the lift. Take another girl next time, Bob. There'll be lots more moonlight."

"O.K.," he sighed. "So long."

The car leaped away with a guttural roar. He waved back to her and she returned the farewell. Then, business-like, she turned toward the frowning building, her escort already out of her mind, and tripped up the well-worn stone steps. She opened the door, walked down a corridor lined with twin coat-rooms and out upon a broad expanse of shining waxed hardwood floor.

Sun poured in at the gayly curtained windows. Balloons and gaudily decorated lights drooped in the heat from the high ceiling. The dance hall looked brash and incongruous by daylight. At night it was an artificial fairyland, manufactured of flamboyant decorations, soft jazz music, colored lights and pretty girls. Gladland was the most popular dance hall in San Francisco. Its floor was the smoothest and largest. Its band created the most proficient syncopated din. And, what was most important, its hostesses were the prettiest and best dancers of their profession in town.

But the hostesses were distinctly flowers of the night. They were not accustomed to blooming by daylight. One glance at the attractive but rather sullen

faces of fifteen of them as they were now assembled on the floor inside the railing would have confirmed this. They slouched languidly in little groups. The hard California sunlight was not kind to their too red cheeks, revealing the chemicals by which the color of "health" was wrought. Tired lines were exposed under artificially bright and rather bold eyes. Afternoon attire did not become their lithe bodies as did the carefully chosen, tight fitting and rather scant evening dresses they wore during business hours after dark.

They did not relish the mission for which they had been assembled. It meant over-time labor without pay.

Two men in their shirt sleeves stood facing the rather bored coryphees. The tall, middle-aged man with prematurely gray hair and with a cold cigar dangling from the side of his hard mouth was regarding them through slaty, half-closed eyes in silence. The younger and short, fat male beside him was talking in an excited, strident voice.

"Come on, girls, for the love of Mike show a little pep," he was urging. "The fleet's in. Doesn't that snap you out of it at all? These sailors will think you are a bunch of dead ones. They'll all beat it over to Rose Gardens tonight. If you haven't any pride in this place, then concentrate on the money you'll be losing when the opposition gets all the customers. We're supposed to have the classiest dames in the city, but nobody would believe it to look at you wilted peaches. When we get down to the dock, I want you all to flash your prettiest smiles and strut your stuff."

He turned from his harangue as Peachy strolled through one of the turnstiles and leisurely joined the other girls.

"Well, Miss Deane," he greeted her, essaying sarcasm, "I thought we were going to be without your charming company this afternoon. Where have you been?"

She regarded him calmly.

"Oh, lay off, Fat Boy," she said coldly. "I was tied up. What's the idea of this convention, anyway?"

The stocky youth was about to make an angry retort. The taller and older man stopped him by taking a step forward and addressing Peachy.

"We got you girls together to take you down and meet the sailors from the fleet when they come ashore," he explained with almost an air of deference to her. "We figure that if they get a good peek at you and the other girls they'll all be up here hot-foot tonight. That'll be good business for you."

At this tribute to their charms the girls brightened up a bit. All except Peachy. She seemed to be saying something under her breath that sounded suspiciously like, "Applesauce." Jake Kiernan, proprietor of the Gladland Dance Hall, could afford to be nice to her. She was his star hostess. She brought as much business to his palace of terpsichore as did all the rest of the taxi dancers together. The trouble was, she knew it.

The other girls were regarding her with a mixture of admiration and sparsely diluted envy. She was

the best dressed, best looking one on the floor. Pressed, they would grudgingly have admitted this. But her air of independence annoyed them. Her unfailing success with the male customers not only hurt their pride but their pocketbooks. Like most girls who are tremendously attractive to men, Peachy was not overly popular with her own sex. Keen competitors are seldom friendly.

"Well, let's get started then," Peachy said briskly.

"Fine," cried the fat man, who was Albert "Shorty" Sullivan, press agent for Gladland.

He bent over and picked up a huge round basket at his feet. It was filled to the brim with white carnations.

"Step up, girls, and get a flower," instructed Sullivan.

He rapidly passed them out, one to a hostess. Peachy accepted hers and turned over the tag attached to its stem and read the inscription on it: "Meet Me at Gladland Dance Hall."

"The boats from the fleet will be coming in at the Howard Street Wharf in fifteen minutes," said the press agent. "We've got a 'bus outside to take you girls down there—at least it ought to be here by this time. When you get to the water front, stand on the wharf and give these boys a real San Francisco welcome when they come ashore. Pick out a live looking number and hand him a smile and a flower."

"Suppose they try to get fresh with us," piped up a rather plump looking blonde, built like Tunney.

The other girls laughed.

"That would be *too* bad," snapped Sullivan with biting irony. "The idea of a dame with your heft asking a question like that." He turned to the rest of them. "Come on, girls, let's go."

They languidly followed him across the floor and out toward the front door, chattering among themselves.

Peachy brought up the rear, walking beside a thin, frail looking girl with wistful blue eyes.

"How are you feeling today, Mamie? Better?" asked Peachy in a friendly voice.

Mamie, never strong, had nearly succumbed to the heat of the previous evening and Peachy had taken her home. Mamie was the one true worshipper whom the red headed girl possessed among her associates.

"I'm all right today," Mamie replied. "I'm fine. Didn't I tell you my boy friend was coming in with the fleet this afternoon? He's an oiler on the *Nebraska.*"

"That's fine," said Peachy. "Did he write you and tell you he'd see you?"

"Well—no," Mamie admitted. "I guess he's been at sea pretty near ever since we met and couldn't mail a letter. Sailors don't get so very much time to write."

Peachy looked at her with a mixture of pity and amusement. Poor Mamie. Falling for a sailor. Well, thank goodness, Peachy was saying to herself, *she* had more sense. Fancy getting all on edge with excite-

ment over a greasy and undoubtedly unfaithful oiler, as Mamie was at that moment.

"You don't really pay any attention to the line of bull that a sailor hands you, do you, dearie?" asked Peachy anxiously.

"This one was different," Mamie insisted.

"Sure—they're *all* different. Till you find they're all alike! It's O.K. to dance with them and take their money and even flirt a little to boost business, but you sure make one awful mistake when you take one of them seriously. All men are fakes, and sailors are the worst of the lot."

"I don't know why you're so sore on sailors," said Mamie with spirit. "They sure treat *you* nice. Look at the presents they bring you. I bet you'll come back loaded with loot this afternoon."

"I've nothing against sailors," Peachy declared. "My father was a sailor—a warrant officer on the old *Kearsarge*—and he was sure a prince. But he was an exception. You know what they say about sailors —'a girl in every port.' Well, that's your average gob all right. Here today and gone tomorrow, and get the girls while the getting's good. Fills you full of a lot of fine language about being the only girl he ever loved, and then forgets you before his ship has passed out through the Golden Gate. Play their own game with them, Mamie—that's my motto. Kid 'em and forget 'em. And now come on, girlie, or we'll miss this old 'bus and Kiernan and Shorty will have a fit."

They had reached the sidewalk. A huge 'bus was panting and snorting by the curb in front of Gladland. It was already comfortably filled by the girls with the white carnations. Peachy and Mamie hastily climbed aboard and stumbled over sprawling silken legs to find a seat up near the front.

"All set?" sang out Shorty Sullivan from the driver's seat.

The girls squealed approval.

"Let's go!" commanded the fat press agent to the driver.

Gladland's reception committee to the Pacific Fleet was on its way.

CHAPTER IV

A MAJESTIC gray line of ships was leisurely making its way into San Francisco Bay. The Farallone Islands and the dangerous rocks at the entrance to the Golden Gate had been left behind. Now the flagship at the head of the formation was opposite the outlying regions of the city shoreline. Sharp white prows gracefully cut the sparkling waters of the Bay. Behind the turreted leader glided battleship after battleship, floating arsenals of the deep. Spick and span fighting ships bristling with armament. Further along the procession came cruisers, heavy and light, destroyers and grim, low lying submarines. Colliers, auxiliary ships of all types and a new, flat decked airplane carrier were odd companions to the sleek combatant vessels.

The decks of the ships were seething but orderly hives of activity. From the engine rooms in the bowels of the steel giants to the signal towers aloft officers and men were toiling in a pleasant excitement. They had been at sea for many a long week and shore was now only a stone's throw away. Even as they worked their minds were upon the pleasures and adventures that the next few days promised them.

Flags ran up on the signal halyards of the flagship

and were answered in a jiffy by similar combinations of hunting on the other craft. The flagship slightly altered her course. The others followed simultaneously. The movement was executed as if the ships were pulled at the same time by invisible wires.

Now there was an air of especially tense expectancy on every ship. Eyes were glued upon the signal tower of the flagship. The fleet had nearly reached Man O' War Row, its anchoring ground. San Francisco's harbor's landmark, the Ferry Building, was just off the port bow of the flagship. Market Street, running like a ribbon from the water front to the Twin Peaks in the near distance, was in sight. Goat and Alcatraz Islands loomed ahead. To starboard, the busy city of Oakland was heralding a welcome; ferry boats darting in and out of their slips were blowing their whistles and sirens. Answering din came from the San Francisco side. Even the gulls swooping down toward the decks of the visitors seemed to be screaming a greeting. Waving crowds of people lined the wharves and were adding their voices to the pandemonium.

Three gayly colored flags flashed smartly aloft on the flagship and snapped in the brisk breeze. Duplicate pennants arose promptly on each ship in the line. Tired engines were suddenly stilled. The squads of men clustered on the bows of the men-of-war sprang into action. Orders barked. Anchor chains rattled in the hawse pipes. Massive prong-like pieces of metal showed dark against the gray sides of the men-o'-war

and descended splashing into the cold waters of the bay.

The fleet was in!

In the signal tower of the U.S.S. California a tall, blond young sailor lowered the semaphore flags he had been using industriously and smiled a wide grin of satisfaction. He looked expectantly toward the San Francisco shore and then cast an anxious glance down the rope ladder leading from his lofty perch to the deck. Eight bells sounded down on the bridge of the ship. The sailor frowned, then looked more cheerful as the bulky form of a comrade started to make its way up the ladder. The newcomer's head appeared in the opening of the tower. Soon he was standing beside the original occupant.

"O.K., Fat," said Signalman Edward Bascom Briggs cheerfully and handed the flags to his relief.

"Going ashore?" asked the second sailor, accepting the flags.

"You said it!" cried Eddie.

"I'm going tomorrow. It's bad luck to go the first day."

"Bunk, sailor," said Eddie. "You're as sore as a pup because you're stuck here."

Before the other could make further retort, Eddie had swung himself upon the ladder and was scrambling down its precipitous path as fast as nimble young legs and nearly four years of experience in the Navy could take him. He reached the deck and joined the bluejacketed horde that was ducking down companion-

ways into the living quarters of the vessel like ants scurrying to their holes.

Boatswains' whistles were piping. Boatswains' raucous voices were shouting, "Lay aft, the liberty party!" Boatswains were in a hurry to get ashore too. Motor launches were being lowered over the side. Already the craft bearing the yeoman with the ship's mail was in the water and its engine purring. Even as Eddie ran along the deck rail, the mail launch slipped away from the ship's steep side and darted toward the shore.

He hurried down a companionway, made several turns and reached the wide and immaculate open space where the deck crew bunked. A region of metal stanchions and uniformly placed hammock nettings. A hot region also. But the gobs, industriously pulling dress blues out of sea bags and trying to doff their working clothes as they did so, were not minding the heat. They were a band of youths with but a single thought, that of reaching shore as quickly as possible.

Now the speeding Eddie had reached his own sea bag and was loosening the lanyard at its canvas top. He reached inside and pulled out underwear, a neatly wrapped blue dress uniform, a clean white canvas cap, fresh socks and a shining new pair of shoes. Beside him a tall sailor with a shock of curly black hair stood stripped to his underwear.

"Hurry up, Eddie," sang out the tall one. "I beat you to it."

"You had a head start, Al," puffed Eddie. "I had

to come down from that bird cage. I thought Parsons would never get up there to relieve me."

"None of them reliefs are anxious to be ahead of time today," grinned Al. "They're grouchy because we're going ashore."

"Don't blame them," said Eddie, clad like Al by this time and his voice muffled as he pushed his head into his dress blouse.

They concentrated at their labors in silence for a few moments. A few finishing dabs with a comb at his smooth blond locks and Eddie, setting his cap on his head at a rakish angle, sang out, "All set, Al?"

"All set," returned his pal.

They turned and ran toward the companionway leading to the upper regions of the deck. Attaining the air, they made their way on the double quick to the after part of the ship. Already a long single line of bluejackets was formed there near the rail. A portly middle-aged chief boatswain's mate with an arm laden with gold service stripes was pacing up and down in front of the line and glowering at a slip of paper which he held in his gnarled brown hand. More gobs were slipping into the line by the minute.

"Come on, Double Duty," Eddie called out. "Shove us off."

"Hold your gab," Double Duty Duffy snapped back. "I'm running this liberty party." Then, suddenly recognizing his heckler, he stared at him in surprise, seemed about to speak further, changed his mind and walked away.

Al grinned at Eddie.

"Double Duty is right in his element," commented Al. "He'll hold us here as long as he can, the bum. All the lads better have their shoes shined pretty and their faces clean or this tough egg will keep 'em aboard."

"He's a crab," returned Eddie. Something about the broad back of Boatswain Duffy seemed to amuse Signalman Briggs.

"You said it," agreed Al. "Say, how come he let you crash this liberty party anyway? I thought you got your liberty taken away on account of that battle you had with Searchlight Doyle in Shanghai."

Eddie grinned.

"Come over here a little closer, old timer, and I'll spill you a secret," he promised. Al moved over. "Duffy don't know I'm going ashore," said Eddie in a lower voice. "Did you get how surprised he was to see me here? He's letting me alone now. When he inspects us, he'll pretend to remember I'm in bad and bawl me out plenty and send me back to quarters. Only he doesn't know as much as he thinks he does. See that?" Eddie surreptitiously held out a slip of paper. "That's special permission from Lieutenant Girard, officer of the deck, for Signalman Edward Briggs to go ashore, see? I pulled a sob story with Girard this morning and got away with it. Said my folks were all set to meet me ashore. I hated to pull that bunk on Girard. He's a prince."

"You said it!" confirmed Al.

"Pipe down," warned Eddie. "Duffy's coming over."

The hard boiled chief boatswain's mate was indeed heading their way, his cold gray gimlet eyes bright with suspicion. He glared at Eddie, a sneer upon his thin lips that turned into a smile of satisfaction as he turned away. Duffy was thinking, with pleasure, of the shock he was going to hand this fresh gob when he extracted him from the shore-going mob.

Finally, the boatswain, with a scowling glance up and down the now double line, assured himself that the liberty party had about reached its complement. He took his position in front of the middle of the line.

"Atten-shun!" he bawled.

The sailors in their best shore-going clothes snapped to a rigid position. The chatter abruptly ceased.

"Answer to your names," rasped Duffy.

He started shouting names and was answered by a prompt "Here!" in each instance.

"Briggs!" he yelled. Duffy waited, like a cat about to pounce upon an unsuspecting mouse.

"Here!" replied Eddie cheerfully.

Duffy walked briskly over to the unperturbed Eddie.

"There's a mistake here and you know it, Briggs," said Duffy. "You pulled something phoney to get your name on this list. You get no liberty in San Francisco. Step out of line and go back to your quarters."

Eddie said nothing. He merely held out the paper

which he had just finished showing to Al. Duffy almost snatched it from his hand. The face of the boatswain's mate fell as he read the message signed by Lieutenant Girard. He scowled, shook his head.

"By God, Briggs, I don't know how you do it!" roared Duffy. "You ought to be in the brig instead of raising hell ashore. All I can say is that you better behave yourself this time or the old man will get after you and, note or no note, you'll get yours."

"I suppose you'd weep over that, hey, Mr. Duffy?" taunted Eddie.

"I'd string you up to a yardarm with pleasure," said Duffy with conviction.

"You won't get the chance, old timer," assured Briggs.

"Don't be so sure about that, young feller. You're just the kind that's always in hot water. You're too smart for this Navy."

Duffy angrily crumpled the note into his pocket and, taking his position in front of the line, barked another order.

"Show your passes, men," he commanded.

He walked slowly along the row of bluejackets, inspecting the credentials of every man present. Then he submitted the party to another inspection of their personal appearance. A chagrined oiler was sent below to shine his shoes. A frightened rookie yeoman with a button missing on his trousers was ordered to go back to his ditty box and repair the defect. The

gobs shot resentful looks at Duffy for his delay and fidgeted openly. Already the Bay was seething with launches speeding ashore with laughing, shouting sailors from other ships.

"All right, men," snapped Duffy finally. "Mark the returnin' time well on your passes and get back to the ship promptly. Any man overstayin' his leave will be reported by me to the officer of the deck and punished accordin' to regulations. Atten-shun, liberty party! Forward march to the port companionway. I want no over-crowding of the boats. There's plenty to go around and San Francisco ain't goin' to move away before you get there."

The party moved in orderly twin lines toward the companionway. But, alas for Duffy's discipline and alas for Duffy's angry shouts, they broke ranks at the top of the wooden road to heaven and frankly fought each other for the choice first positions on the companionway steps. It was a miracle that a dozen men did not fall overboard. Lieutenant Girard, pacing the bridge far above them, looked down and smiled, almost enviously. He had been a gob once himself and knew what shore leave after a cruise meant.

Eddie and Al reached the first launch, moored at the foot of the companionway, with the speed born of experience and agility. Indeed they were the first to board the boat and scramble hastily to a seat in the stern. Intent upon their own business and not paying attention to the sailors leaping into the craft seemingly

from all sides and causing it to careen dangerously, they discussed how best to spend the precious hours in the magic city just over the water.

"How much liberty did your boy friend, the lieutenant, give you, Ed?" Al asked.

"Till one o'clock tomorrow morning," Eddie replied. "But that's all right with me. There isn't a town exists that I can't do in eight hours."

"You're out of luck, old timer," joshed Al good naturedly. "I'm off till six o'clock in the morning. So are all the rest of these guys. Still, you can't kick. Every minute Girard handed you is a gift."

"Don't worry about me. I work so much faster than the rest of this ship's company that I can do twice as much in five hours less."

Their conversation ceased abruptly as the final contingent of shipmates piled into the launch. In the scramble for seats Al's long legs were stumbled over many times and both he and Briggs had to cling to the gunwales of the boat to keep from being swept overboard.

The young tempest temporarily subsiding, Al turned confidentially to his buddy.

"How about going up to the Gladland Dance Hall with me tonight, Ed?" suggested Al. "I got a swell girl up there and she can probably dig up a friend."

"Yeh?" said Eddie with a discouraging lack of interest. "Was she the freckle faced bimbo that bid you good bye at the dock when we shoved off from this town in May?"

A Paramount Picture *The Fan's I—*

PURSUING A RED HEADED GIRL IS DANGEROUS BUSINESS.

"She ain't freckled," protested Al, aggrieved. "She's a good looker. And she likes me."

"She's not particular then," joshed Eddie. "And probably her friend wouldn't be either. Personally I'm not strong for these dance hall skirts. They're too free and easy. They dance with any flat-foot that's got a dime in his blouse. Kid you along and try to nick you for your roll. Take everything and give nothing. A guy is a nut to fall for any of them."

"I suppose you know a lot of fine society dames here, hey?" scoffed Al. "I suppose a squad of 'em will be down at the dock fightin' to shanghai you in their Rolls-Royces."

"Don't get jealous, Al," soothed Eddie, mockingly patting his chum on the back. "Every gob can't be as strong with the girls as I am. You have to have 'it'—personality. It sticks out all over me. Treat 'em rough and make 'em like it—that's me. I don't have to worry about getting women, whether I know any in advance or not."

"Well, I warn you, kiddo, you ain't goin' to take this Gladland dame away from me as easy as you did that blonde in Honolulu."

"The one in Honolulu was a good looker. A homely mug like you had no right with a pippin like she was. This one you're talking about now is a dud. Don't worry. You can keep her."

"Thanks much, Mr. Heart Breaker," answered Al. But there was a touch of envy in Al's voice. Much

of Eddie Briggs' confidence in his prowess with the fair sex was well grounded. It had been proven too many times to the awkward and inadept Al for him to scoff at it. It seemed that every time poor Al dug up a girl of more than ordinary good looks and won her good graces by liberal expenditure of labor and hard-earned Navy pay, there was his friend Eddie to take her away with effortless ease. It was aggravating, it was. And yet Eddie accomplished his piracy with such evident good nature and skill that Al could do nothing but stand abashed and admire. You couldn't get sore at Eddie; he was such a good scout and so loyal in their daily man-to-man contact.

"Hey, Watson, how about shoving off? This boat is full enough to sink," sang out Eddie suddenly to the petty officer in charge of the launch.

"Pipe down, Briggs, or I'll send you back to the ship!" returned the boatswain's mate promptly.

But Eddie's impudence had its reward. Orders were shouted to cast off. The machinist's mate threw the clutch in. The propeller churned water. The mooring lines were cast into the boat. The California's first shore launch pointed its nose toward the wharf and shot out into the Bay, joining the gay flotilla of similar craft from other vessels. The engine was shot into full speed. The passengers stared anxiously toward the city and all smiled with satisfaction.

CHAPTER V

I

Eddie Briggs was a spoiled young man. The spoiling, started in his babyhood by a doting mother, had been continued at her death in the lad's early 'teens by a father too busy and too fond of his only child to enforce much-needed discipline. Eddie was the blond, fair cheeked, good looking type of boy toward whom it is so easy to feel indulgent. He grew up into young manhood very, very sure of himself and with the idea that he had but to wish for almost anything in order to possess it. The world was, to him, a very excellent place in which to live. He looked out upon it with a grasping hand and a good-natured laugh.

His environment up to the time he joined the Navy only served to confirm his extremely optimistic ideas about himself and life. The elder Briggs had become moderately wealthy by operating a small but luxurious hotel in Reno, Nevada. It was a seclusive, well managed hostelry much favored by rich men and women, visitors in that popular Western desert city for the purpose of separating themselves from their erstwhile mates by the convenient process of a Nevada divorce. Eddie, as the proprietor's son, had the run of the place.

During his high school days, women guests, with little else to do and in a mood for flirtations, began noticing their host's husky, handsome son. Eddie did not resent their attentions, despite the frowns and warnings of his father.

Contact with women of the divorcée type did not tend to elevate the growing youth's ideals regarding the opposite sex. He developed a technique and finesse in dealing with them far beyond the worldly wisdom with which a boy of his years should be equipped. He began to believe that all women could be won by smiles and flattering small talk. At nineteen he was even becoming rather bored with women. Always of an active, very restless nature, he talked of leaving Reno and of seeking new worlds to conquer.

It did not come as a great shock of dismay and unmitigated sorrow to Briggs, senior, when Eddie, following the visit of a Navy recruiting officer to the town, announced that he was determined to join the service for at least one enlistment rather than to enter the state university as he had been expected to do. The elder Briggs, worried about his son, had been a bit distrustful of what a co-educational college would do for the boy. After the first disappointment at the change of plans had passed and he analyzed the situation, Mr. Briggs had wondered if naval discipline, freedom from women and the necessity of making his own way in a man's world was not exactly what Eddie needed.

So Eddie Briggs joined the Navy and, after his apprenticeship, was assigned as a second class seaman to the U.S.S. California.

Unfortunately Uncle Sam had not yet proven the taskmaster that John Briggs had hoped for. Seaman Briggs was still the same Eddie who had won the smiles of society women in the velvety lobby of the hotel in Reno. He accepted hard work on shipboard with the same good-natured smile that won him caresses from Reno-stranded matrons. He lorded it over his shipmates with calm assurance, and they liked him for it. He baited the Double Duty Duffys of life with a subtle skill and glib tongue that left them furious but helpless. He broke the regulations and served time in the brig without the slightest ruffling of his self-assurance. His high spirits and intelligence won him favor from the officers. His training with women served him well when he got ashore and he was not slow in making use of it. He enjoyed the company of girls, but he remained cynical about them. They were, he believed, created for the pleasure of Eddie Briggs. Falling in love was a laugh.

He liked crude, awkward Al Pearce, from the wheat fields of Iowa, at once because Al was unconsciously humorous, a good butt for jokes, and intensely loyal to him. Besides, Al, a veteran, had taught him the ropes when he joined the California, a raw recruit, and saved him a vast deal of time and embarrassment. Eddie never forgot a friend.

Now Eddie, nearing the end of his enlistment and

a bronzed, handsome youth of twenty-three years, no longer needed Al's advice about the intricacies of life on the bounding deep. He could give the older Al cards and spades about gobdom or almost anything else. He did not worry much about what was to happen to him when his Navy term was up. Lieutenant Girard had urged him to buckle down hard to serious work and became an officer. He might do that. He had played long enough, Eddie vaguely admitted, and would soon have to apply himself to something. Too bad his dad had chosen this particular time to take a long deferred trip to Europe. The elder Briggs might otherwise have met him in San Francisco and they could have talked things over.

Eddie had been away from the States for nearly six months. It was three weeks since he had felt dry land under his feet. Now, at last, he was headed ashore! He was a sailor and he was thrilled to the marrow at the prospect that awaited him.

"Speed it up, Johnny!" he suddenly shouted to the grimy sailor in dungarees bent over the purring motor of the California's launch. "All these other boats are beating us ashore."

Machinist's Mate Johnny Poole, ignoring the frowns of the petty officer technically in command of the boat, grinned at Eddie and obligingly notched up the engine.

San Francisco Bay seemed seethingly alive with small boats. Foam and spray flashed and flew from a hundred sharp keels. Battleships, cruisers, destroy-

ers, submarines, auxiliary ships—all were sending their first gay liberty parties ashore, and all seemed intent upon reaching there first. Accidents were narrowly averted. Motors were raced to the breaking point. Helmsmen called upon every artifice they knew to secure an advantage over rival crafts. The California's fast launch fairly skimmed over the sparkling water.

They passed boat after boat. Taunts and jeers arose from the husky throats of Eddie and his shipmates as a competitor was left in the white wake of their propeller. But it was early apparent that the California was not destined to be the ultimate winner in the race. Nor were they to be denied the chagrin of having their gunwales wet with the spray of faster craft that passed them from astern. Even as Eddie and Al were leading the catcalls directed toward a foe just left behind, the crack new launch of the U.S.S. Washington drew alongside them and slid past as if the California's launch were standing still.

"Get that canal boat out of the channel, Briggs," yelled a hoarse voice from the Washington boat. "Throw me a line and we'll tow you in!"

Eddie's eyes flashed over toward the voice. He recognized its owner, a stocky red headed gob in the sternsheets of the other launch. It was Searchlight Doyle, with whom Briggs had clashed in Honolulu.

"You'll need your head start, Searchlight," Eddie retorted. "I'll tell the girls I saw you."

But Eddie's heart was not in his shout. He would

rather anybody but Searchlight had passed them. He vainly called upon the California's engine man for more speed.

"She's doing all she can—and more," explained the latter. "The Washington has the new type of speed launches. They can beat hell out of this ice wagon."

As they neared shore and could make out the laughing, shouting crowd lining the dock, they saw that all the speed in the world would be of little avail in reaching land first. What was needed was a marine traffic cop and ten wharves instead of one. Chugging, impatient launches were lined up fifteen deep around the dock. There was a solid sea of decks between the California and the precious shore. Sailors were being disembarked from those nearest the wharf as quickly as possible, but there was always another boat to take the place of the one that had shoved off empty. And the traffic seemed to be getting always thicker and thicker.

The newcoming California boat slid against the gunwale of the furthermost outpost of the swarming fleet of small craft and came to a stop. Despite the wails and protests of its passengers, it was forced to lie there helplessly.

"Gee, are we going to spend the rest of the day here?" lamented Al. "I got business ashore there. I gotta be on my way."

Eddie was surveying the static scene impatiently. He hated to stay long in one place. The fact that Searchlight Doyle was somewhere over there, nearer

shore than he, and that Searchlight had guyed him, was especially annoying. Eddie was not accustomed to sitting still and watching other people best him to anything. He stood up and studied the situation.

Then, suddenly, with a wild whoop, he leaped upon the crowded deck of the launch next to them. He scrambled over assorted arms, legs and laps. Cries and profanity rent the air. Eddie laughed at them. Hands clutched for his fast moving legs. He evaded them. He had leaped from the first launch to another, nearer shore. He repeated the performance many times over careening decks, all the while making rapid progress toward his goal. He saw a well known face over to his starboard and made for it. Fate was, as usual, smiling upon him. Searchlight Doyle was leaning over, picking something up from the bottom of the Washington boat. Before Searchlight was aware of his coming, Eddie had planted a solid sailor shoe upon the former's broad back and used it for a springboard to catapult himself to the next floating bridge.

"Hey, you got a swell nerve!" roared Searchlight.

"Excuse me, Searchlight. I have to beat you to the prettiest girl in San Francisco," Eddie flung back.

A few minutes more and he had attained the launch actually alongside the dock and discharging passengers. He elbowed in among them. Panting but triumphant, he joined them and hurried up the gangway to dry land. Al had long since been left far behind. Eddie Briggs stood on the San Francisco

wharf, smiling and triumphant, eager for whatever adventure the most romantic city in America might offer him.

II

Peachy Deane had emerged from the 'bus that had brought the Gladland girls to the dock, warm, tired and resentful of the mission that had forced her to put her daytime job at the department store in jeopardy.

But in a few minutes she was glad she had come. There was a cool breeze whipping up from the Bay. And the sight of the majestic monarchs of the Pacific Fleet steaming slowly in to their anchorage thrilled her tremendously. Long before the first launch had put off with its complement of sailors and was speeding toward her, her blue eyes were bright with excitement. The crowds around her were sharing her enthusiasm. It was a gala holiday occasion. Wives, sweethearts and just sightseers were there to greet the bluejackets. Laughter, exclamations of expectancy, youth and high spirits were in the air. It was infectious.

Only the pale, drooping Mamie, standing beside Peachy as if for protection, seemed not to share the buoyancy of the occasion.

"Still thinking about that gob boy friend of yours?" asked Peachy gently.

Mamie nodded.

"Don't worry. He'll be here big as life in a minute," soothed the red headed girl with a confidence she did not feel.

Two or three launches were quickly emptied. Sailors, free for the moment and quite evidently delighted with the fact, raced up the gangway in a fast moving, solid line. Arrived on shore, they glanced expectantly around. Arms were flung frankly around some. Wives greeted their husbands. Sweethearts kissed their mates. Here and there a proud father shook hands with his boy. Many left the scene arm in arm to seek automobiles or street cars.

Mamie's gray, ineffectual eyes swept the outpouring sailors with wistful anxiety. She was heedful neither of Peachy's soothing prophecy nor of the flirtatious chatter which the over-rouged Gladland blonde, Babe, on the other side of her exchanged with the incoming sailors.

But suddenly Mamie's drooping body was electrified. Her dull eyes brightened. She clutched Peachy's arm.

"There's my George now!" cried Mamie. She pointed to a tall, shambling and very homely machinist's mate who was headed toward her. Peachy surveyed him with interest. Any small hope she might have had for Mamie's happiness fell. She recognized the newly arrived George. He had made the same promises to every girl at Gladland, including herself.

Mamie tried to fluff her hair with nervous fingers. She summoned her sweetest smile. Paradise loomed.

George was headed her way. But alas for Mamie! Just as she was about to call out a joyous greeting, the tall gob stopped in front of the straw-haired Babe.

"Hello, kid, been waiting long?" he asked carelessly, flinging an arm about her.

"Why, George, it's great to see you!" gushed Babe. "Handsomer than ever, ain't you?"

They walked off arm in arm. Babe paused to fling back a cocky little smile at Peachy and Mamie. The former could joyfully have slain the blonde upon the spot. But Mamie had slumped down and would perhaps have fainted had not Peachy slipped a strong arm under her shoulders.

"Buck up, kiddo," whispered Peachy. "There's plenty more poor fish where he came from. Buck up. Shorty's watching you. He'll tell Kiernan you gummed the party and then where would you be?"

Mamie finally straightened up, wiped her moist eyes and tried to summon a smile into her woebegone face.

In a moment Peachy was facing a problem of her own. A dark, good looking sailor swept up to her and seized both of her hands in greeting. He would have kissed her had he dared. But one did not kiss Peachy so extemporaneously.

"Hello, Peachy," he greeted, devouring her slim body with his eyes. "Still the raving beauty, hey?"

"Hello yourself, Bill," she replied. "You're looking pretty swell too."

All cynicism had apparently dropped from her. Her smile was warm and sparkling. Her husky voice was

warm, inviting. Out of the corners of her alert eyes she had caught a glimpse of a bright blue and gold coolie coat upon the arm of her bluejacketed admirer. He seemed to sense her interest in the coat without even being aware that she had seen it. He spread it out proudly before her.

"I picked this up for you in Yokohama, Peach. Ain't it a beaut?" he said and handed it over to her.

She examined it, bubbling enthusiasm.

"Oh, Bill, you're a dear," she cried. "You're too good to me. You really are."

"That's all right," he swaggered. "Nothing's too good for you, Peach. But listen, kid, how about leaving this place now and having dinner with me? I know a little joint where——"

She laid an apologetic arm upon his broad shoulder. She came very close to him, looked up into his face with sorrowful eyes and said, "I can't, Bill. I don't dare leave yet. I'd love to. You're a nice boy. But I'll see you up at Gladland tonight. I'll dance with you as soon as you get there. And here's something to remember me with until I see you again."

She handed him the carnation with the tag on it.

And, in spite of his heated urgings, Machinist's Mate Bill had to depart with the flower and without the coat. But his departure was not without compensation, for had not Peachy's eyes and smile told him that of all the personnel of the fleet he was to be her favorite for the evening?

When he was out of earshot, she turned to Mamie.

"That's the way to treat these fellows—kid 'em and leave 'em," said Peachy vehemently. "They'll think just as much of you." She was giving the coat a minute examination. "Say, this is a peach, isn't it? Poor Bill. He must have spent a month's pay on it."

A jovial voice sounded at her bent right ear.

"Look up and give your loving Oscar a royal welcome!" sang out a roly-poly sailor with a bellow like a fog horn.

Peachy faced around. Again she assumed the warm, greeting smile and the caressing accent.

"Why, Oscar," she cried. "Imagine meeting you here! What luck. And so handsome with your coat of tan."

Oscar beamed. He produced a package from under his arm.

"Here's something I plucked in the biggest ukelele orchard in Hawaii," he said. "I'll never forget how you jazzed that old uke the last time I saw you, Peach. I brought this for you."

She accepted the instrument with gushing thanks and strummed a few jazz chords on it.

"I love a uke—and this is a marvel. So are you," she chortled.

With a side glance at the interested Mamie he drew Peachy toward him.

"How about having dinner with me—just us two—now," he invited in low tones. His fingers were caressing her smooth, bare arm.

For a brief instant she pressed closely to him. She

whispered, "I can't, old dear. I've got to stay here for quite a while yet. I'm on the welcome committee. But I'll save some very special dances for you tonight. And I'll play this big, beautiful uke for you. How's that?"

He shrugged. He was disappointed. But he knew it was useless to argue with Peachy. Eventually he rolled off, leaving his ukelele behind him. She watched him going. When he was out of sight, she gave a short, quick little laugh. Not a very pleasant laugh.

The incident was repeated. Many times. In half an hour Peachy was surrounded with bundles. The spoils of peace. The Pacific Fleet's tribute to the most beautiful and most aggravating hostess at Gladland. Tributes from Singapore and Honolulu and Shanghai and Manila and Yokohama. From oilers and seamen and petty officers and from one ensign.

And now Peachy was about ready to leave. She was warm and tired. The novelty and original romance of the occasion had worn off. The other girls had distributed their carnations and had long since assigned their persons to favorites among the sailors and departed upon stalwart blue arms. Peachy had persuaded Mamie to go home and try to snatch some rest before her evening's toil at Gladland began.

"You want to look your best tonight, dearie," Peachy had coaxed. "Strut your stuff and that big boob George will flock back to you like a homing pigeon."

"He's not a boob,'" Mamie had come back hotly.

"Well, have it your own way. But there's one system that always works with the unfair sex—look niftier than the next girl."

Finally Mamie left. Peachy sighed and looked out toward the end of the wharf.

There were still more launches discharging their human cargo. But Peachy assured herself that she had done her duty for the afternoon. Besides, if she received any more bundles she wouldn't be able to carry them. She didn't care to squander her money on a taxi cab.

She stooped down to pick up her prizes and depart for home.

CHAPTER VI

I

It was while she was gathering the bundles into her arms with some effort that she became aware of the light haired, good looking young sailor staring at her rather rudely some ten feet away.

Ordinarily she would not have minded this. She was used to it. And he was such a nice, clean cut appearing young man. But he had such a self-confident, personal way of staring. As if somehow he had some special claim on her. And he was a stranger. He seemed to be looking clear through her. She was conscious that her leaning posture was revealing a more than liberal expanse of her silken legs, and that he was observing this with pleasure. He took a step nearer to her and seemed about to speak. She flushed angrily. It suddenly flashed into her nimble mind that here was a man different from the ordinary run of sailors. He seemed so sure that he had but to approach her and she would be very glad indeed to see him. The very tilt of his white cap bespoke the conqueror. In spite of herself, an unexplainable fear and shyness momentarily seized her. In self-protection she snatched up

her bundles into her arms and started on a brisk walk toward Market Street.

She had covered half a block before she became aware that he was following her about six paces in the rear. The nerve of him! Her uneasiness left her. Anger flooded her Her blue eyes flashed. In her haste she had not arranged her tower of presents comfortably. They would come tumbling down at any moment. She would like to have stopped and adjusted her burden. But that, she knew, would be an excuse for this fresh gob to speak to her. She hastened on.

Peachy turned into Market Street. After a while she cautiously looked over the top of her bundles and back over her shoulder. He was still there. Her movement brought catastrophe. One of the packages slipped from its mooring and dropped merrily to the sidewalk. Before she had a chance to pick it up, the sailor had fairly leaped to her side and was holding the bundle out to her. His grinning face was observing her admiringly. But she didn't like that grin, attractive as was its setting. It seemed to be mocking her.

She made a curt gesture with her head for him to place the recovered parcel on the top of the heap. He did so and opened his mouth to speak to her. She had turned abruptly on her heel and was off again.

But the presents, accepted so joyfully, now seemed in league against her. In front of the Palace Hotel,

two more bundles, despite her frantic efforts to keep them in place, slipped down to the ground. Again the grinning sailor scooped them up and replaced them on the pile. His grin was broader. He annoyed her tremendously. She flashed fire at him even as she murmured her polite thanks. Again she stifled his opening remarks by abruptly turning and dashing off.

Surely she could not blame her persistent pursuer for the fat Polish maid who now came hurrying out of the Palace Hotel at the precise moment when Peachy resumed her journey and bumped squarely into Gladland's pride. Bundles flew to right and left. Two landed in the gutter. The rest went sailing over the sidewalk.

Peachy, as soon as she had recovered her breath, assailed the stupid face of the maid with volcanic invective. The latter fled. When the dance hall girl had finished flinging personal opinions after the squat, fat figure, she turned to discover the sailor standing grinning by with her treacherous burden all neatly arranged in his arms. He piled the rescued bundles into Peachy's arms without protest. She was on her way without a word.

But now his pursuit of her had become too pronounced and irksome longer to be ignored. She decided to take the bull by the horns. She tempestuously turned and waited until he was near her.

"Say, are you following me?" she asked heatedly.

"It looks like it," he replied blithely.

"Well, I don't like it. Stop it," she commanded.

"All right. I'll walk beside you instead of behind you then. It's O.K. with me."

"You'll do nothing of the sort."

"But, lady," he smiled and assumed his most lady-killing air, "I'm bound your way. It's a public street."

"Get over on the other side of it then. Stop following me or I'll call a cop."

He hesitated. He shrugged his broad shoulders. He looked at her with an amused, mocking air.

"O.K.," he said.

Without further word he turned toward the moiling traffic of Market Street, stepped into it and crossed the street.

For three blocks or more she thought she had lost him. She did not know whether to be glad or sorry. He *did* look interesting. Blond, curly hair and such a refined, handsome, good natured face. She began to wonder if she had not been just a little too severe with him.

She had no time to wonder further. The huge flabby bulk of another man loomed ahead of her. She tried to walk around him. He deliberately planted himself in the middle of the sidewalk, facing her, and moved from one side to the other with her, preventing her from going on. She looked up at him angrily. He was middle aged and flirtatious in elephantine fashion. A huge black moustache almost hid his thick, sensual lips. The aroma of freshly imbibed alcohol scented the air around him. He leered at her. She

looked wildly around for a policeman. None was in sight.

"Come on, cutie, let me give you a lift with those bundles," he offered thickly. "Pretty girl like you has got no right staggering along with such a load."

She blazed at him.

"Listen, big boy," she almost shouted. "There's a cop right around the corner and I'm a swell screamer. I don't need your help. Get out of my way or you'll be taking a ride in the wagon in just about five minutes. Beat it!"

The fury of her and the boldness of her threat had their effect. Open-mouthed, he stepped aside. She sailed by him without a glance to right or left. Sighing with relief at passing this danger, she turned to cross Market Street. Home was only three blocks away now. She felt a hand upon her bare shoulder and, thinking perhaps the masher had after all returned, turned quickly with fire in her eye.

It was the sailor again. His face was serious and perturbed now.

"Say, was that fellow annoying you?" he asked.

"And pray what do you think *you're* doing?" she flung at him. "You're worse than he is. You're sober."

She had the satisfaction of seeing his jaw fall in disappointment. He stared at her questioningly. He was not used to being treated this way by pretty girls. He stood stock still and let her depart in peace.

When he came to his senses, he plunged after her

through the traffic. But it was too late. He had lost sight of her. She was alone and unobserved when she completed her climb up the steep hill of the side street and slipped into the doorway of the cosy apartment house at the top.

II

Eddie Briggs returned slowly to brightly lighted Market Street, defeated in his first encounter with the amazingly pretty red headed stranger but resolved to see her again if he had to ransack the whole town for her.

He walked moodily down San Francisco's wide, noisy main thoroughfare. All his plans for a gay evening ashore had been spoiled by the sudden disappearance of a red head, a pair of amazingly lively blue eyes and two trim silken ankles. Why had he let her slip out of his sight? Another chance to talk to her and he was confident she would have dropped her belligerent reserve and listened to reason. All girls did. Now his chances of finding her again in that populous city before one o'clock the next morning, when he had to be back on board, were practically nil. He tried to tell himself that there were plenty of other attractive girls in town, and more pliable ones too. But somehow the memory of that piquant little nose tilted so fiercely over the high-piled bundles lingered. Gee, he wished he could find that dame.

Well, he would have to make the best of it now. He wondered what had become of Al Pearce. Probably

Al was somewhere doing what Al always did the first thing when he got ashore—eating. Al always said the ship's cook doled the crew out just about enough chow to keep a canary alive. Eddie remembered the downstairs rathskeller restaurant which his shipmate frequently patronized in the Golden Gate city and decided to go there on a chance of finding him.

Eddie's guess was correct. Al was seated under an electric fan in the coolest corner of the restaurant and was about to attack a thick and juicy steak. He caught sight of the approaching Briggs and waved him over with his fork. Eddie slipped into the chair opposite.

"Had chow yet?" asked Al, plunging the first generously filled forkful of steak into his ample mouth. "The steak is swell."

"No, it's too early to eat yet," replied Eddie. Then, on second thought, "Well, I suppose I might as well get it over." He turned to the German waiter hovering near them, "Bring me a steak too."

Al turned industriously to the business of consuming his meal. It was not until he had finished the steak and was attacking some apple pie à la mode, washing it down with a thick mugful of coffee, that he asked Eddie curiously, "Say, how did you make out with Peachy?"

Eddie looked up quickly from his food.

"Who's Peachy?"

"Why, the dame you were following down Howard Street when I got ashore. Gee, Eddie, you didn't

try and get fresh with Peachy without knowin' her, did you?"

"So her name is Peachy, hey?" mused Eddie. "You may be of some use in this world after all, big boy. Where does this red head hang out when she's home?"

Al gave a short, sarcastic laugh.

"You got a swell chance to find that out," he said. "Nobody knows where she lives. She's particular the guys she lets drag her home. No sailors allowed. But if you want to know where you can meet up with her again—and I guess you do from the looks of you—come on with me up to Gladland and I'll show you. She's the star hostess up there."

Eddie wiped his mouth with his napkin and started shouting for his check.

"O.K., Al," he exclaimed. "Let's go."

"Hold your horses, Romeo," bellowed Al. "This joint don't open till eight o'clock and it ain't goin' good till ten or so." He regarded Eddie with an ironic smile. "Say, I thought dance hall dames were below your class. What changed your mind?"

"Pipe down and stir your stumps, sailor," growled Eddie and, seizing his friend under the arms, fairly swung him out of his chair.

CHAPTER VII

The big, ugly looking building that had sizzled that afternoon in the hard sunlight was now ablaze with lights. Syncopated din issued from its open windows. Merriment and laughter sounded from within. Curtains and decorations were swaying in the breeze of the cool San Francisco night.

The sign in twinkling electric lights over the main entrance proclaimed, "Gladland Dance Hall. 25—Beautiful Hostesses—25." Under it a freshly painted canvas banner billowed in the wind, "Fleet Championship Dancing Contest Tonight. Valuable Prizes."

Inside, the festivities at Gladland were at their height. The band was flaring the latest jazz tunes. The refreshment tables set around the spacious dance floor outside the railing were crowded. The floor itself was jammed with dancing couples. Most of the men wore the Navy blue. Tanned masculine faces were very close to pale, painted ones of the other sex. Young bodies pressed together. It was a prosperous night for the hostesses of Gladland.

The music stopped. The couples parted and there was a volley of handclapping from calloused Navy palms. The men applauded hopefully while the girls stood indulgently by. The girls knew the fruitless-

ness of applause. Dances at Gladland were of a definite duration. Presently the dancers walked slowly off the floor.

A flashing red headed girl, all smiles and animation, bid a polite adieu to a tall, rawboned sailor who appeared loth to let her go. Once away from him, her face assumed more business-like lines as she made her way through the mob to the far end of the hall and a cashier's window just outside the hostesses' rest room. The sign over the grilled cage read, "Girls, you make a nickel every time you dance with a customer. So treat them nice. The Management." Peachy joined a line of girls who were cashing in their tickets at the window. She seemed bored and annoyed. When it came her turn at the window, she plunged a hand into her bag and tossed a heap of tickets on the ledge. The hard faced cashier counted them carefully and set three neat rows of coins in their place. Peachy held up her handbag and pushed the money into it, checking it as she did so. The cashier ventured a smiling comment.

"You're having a big night, Peachy," he said.

She shrugged her pretty bare shoulders and sighed.

"When you dance with these human battleships you sure earn all you can get," she said coolly. "The sea makes the feet grow."

She sauntered into the rest room and stopped in front of a full-length mirror to fluff out her bobbed hair and rearrange her scant evening gown. She came out again to face an eager group of bluejackets who

had quite evidently been waiting for her. They had dance tickets clutched between their fingers and were waving them at her.

"I'm next, Peachy! You promised me this afternoon," a good looking gob called out. She glanced at him and recognized the youth who had presented her with the coolie coat. But there were only two tickets in his hand and her eyes swept calmly past him.

"Oh, you red headed mama—papa wants a fox trot," sang out another. He was fat and red-faced. She ignored him.

The music, she knew from experience, was about to start. She caught sight of a chief yeoman with a fistful of tickets. Her eyes rested on him and she nodded slightly. He exultantly stepped up and took her inviting elbow.

She was out in the middle of the over-populated floor, trying to keep her lips away from the overtures of this too ardent partner and at the same time convince him that he was having the dance of his life.

That was why Eddie Briggs did not at first see her when he entered Gladland and, after fortifying himself with a strip of tickets, leaned eagerly on the rail.

Eddie's anxious eyes swung for a moment from the floor to the big sailor standing beside him. He looked again and an amused smile wrinkled his good looking face. He spoke to his companion at the rail.

"Too bad, Searchlight, old top. Now that I'm here, none of the dames will give you a tumble."

Searchlight Doyle abandoned his swaggering attitude to turn and face his rival.

"So, it's the champeen high diver again, hey? I thought these joints were too low class for a sheik like you," he said, frowning.

"Anywhere I can dish you out of a jane, I go, Searchlight," teased Eddie.

Searchlight muttered something under his breath. Then he reached into his blouse pocket and pulled out a silk handkerchief. He opened its folds to disclose a heap of jewelry—ornate ear-rings, a big imitation coral necklace, a brass bracelet and a really exquisite jade ring. Eddie looked and sniffed.

"So that's what happened to the Russian crown jewels," he mocked.

Searchlight frowned.

"Kid 'em if you like," he snapped. "But these dames are out for loot and the lad that treats 'em right does the most business." He pushed a stubby hand into the pile and drew out the jade ring between thumb and forefinger. "See that? That's the grand prize. I bring one of these back every trip. And when you see some sweet mama wearing this ring, you know I'm the head man."

Eddie took the ring and examined it. It was really a beauty, but Briggs would never give his rival the satisfaction of admitting it to him. He smiled and handed it back.

"Birds like you have to bribe them with presents,"

he said. "I just chloroform them with my personality."

Searchlight sniffed.

"What dames ever fell for your personality?" he scoffed.

Eddie hesitated. Then he plunged his hand into his blouse and drew out a stack of picture post cards.

"Well, since we're holding an exhibit," said Eddie, "take a look at these."

He flashed the photographs one by one in front of Searchlight's angry eyes. Each one of the pictures featured Eddie and a girl—different girls. But the pose in each case was the same. The girls were all pretty. Blonde or brunette, each adoring lass had her arms around the stalwart Briggs and was looking up into his face in an attitude of worship. Eddie, on the other hand, was pictured looking away with a somewhat bored expression, as if asking, "Aren't women the fools?"

Searchlight examined the collection intently, for a moment off his guard and frankly interested. Then he pushed the cards away and exclaimed, "Applesauce. That don't mean a thing. Any dame will get her picture took with any sailor. I got a whole art gallery full of them things."

Eddie chuckled and returned the evidence of his lady-killing prowess to its resting place in his blouse. Both youths returned to their pastime of sizing up the hostesses.

Suddenly both stiffened. An exclamation of satisfaction escaped Eddie. He stole a glance at Searchlight and saw that the latter was staring at the same thing. Peachy was dancing by, conversing animatedly with her now subdued yeoman. Eddie did everything possible, next to leaping over the rail, to attract her attention.

Doyle turned to Eddie, a broad smile on his face, and slapped his blouse pocket where his treasure trove of jewelry lay concealed.

"The red head's my pick," he indicated expansively. "That dame can have anything I've got."

"Don't be silly," said Eddie promptly. "I met her this afternoon. She's a friend of mine. I've got her dated already. If you're a good boy, I may let her dance with you later in the evening."

His competitor did not hear the finish of these lofty remarks. The music had stopped, the dancers were leaving the floor and husky Searchlight was elbowing his way toward the exit gate. Eddie looked after him and smiled. There was no use battling Doyle. You didn't dare rough-house in public dance halls or you would be promptly thrown out, he knew. He would have to resort to strategy.

When the next intermission was at an end, Peachy found herself confronting an even larger mob of clamoring sailors than before. In the foreground of her would-be partners grinned a familiar clean cut, good looking face. Confusion swept her usual busi-

ness-like composure. She actually blushed. She had had an uneasy feeling even as she lost him in the crowd that afternoon that she would see him again, that some Nemesis was driving them together. And here he had bobbed up again. She was angry, she told herself. She was furious. Just another fresh sailor.

Why did it require an effort to hate him? She called hotly upon her defenses. She would show him what she thought of him. She stared coldly back at him, chin tilted up, eyes hostile. She stared right through his inviting, confident smile and at the enormous batch of tickets he was waving at her. Somehow the tickets helped her to ignore his overtures. Just another fresh gob trying to hire her soft young body for money. Just like the others. Well, he was the one patron of Gladland with whom she would never dance, not even if it cost her her job.

She turned her eyes to the sailor next to him, the red headed, broad shouldered Searchlight. Heavy set, coarse faced, bold eyed—he was not an attractive personality to the fastidious Peachy. She was about to pass him by when she detected her opponent of the afternoon shooting a quick belligerent glance at him. So—they were enemies, these two men of the fleet. Good! Searchlight was flourishing just as many tickets in the air as was Freshie. Moreover, she suddenly observed, on the middle finger of Doyle's hand flashed the prettiest jade ring that she had ever seen

in a year of gold-digging. That settled it. She summoned her prettiest smile and sidled over to Eddie's rival.

"I had almost forgotten that I had promised this dance to you," she said sweetly, tucking her hand in his blacksmith-like arm.

His conquest was made so quickly that the dull witted Searchlight did not at once take the cue. He stood still and stared at her, open mouthed, incredulous that such good fortune could be his. Then he grinned broadly.

"Sure, this dance is mine, cutie," he roared. "You and me are going to do some swell grapevines." He swept the other crestfallen gobs aside and piloted her toward the dance floor.

For an instant Eddie Briggs' conceit was punctured. Peachy, darting blue eyes back at him, had the satisfaction of seeing him look frankly chagrined, like a baby whose favorite toy has been suddenly snatched away from him. Then his head snapped up. He shrugged his shoulders. His confidence returned. She was just doing this to spite him. Well, he would show her before the evening was over. He surprised a woebegone-faced Mamie by turning to her and with a grand gesture inviting her to dance. She accepted gratefully. He was by far the best looking sailor who had looked at her all evening.

They had to stand aside at the entrance gate to the floor to allow a group of naval officers to pass by. The officers, very snappy in their capes and gold

stripes, were greeted effusively by a worried and dress-suited Jake Kiernan, proprietor of Gladland.

"Good evening, gentlemen," Jake greeted respectfully. "It's an honor to have you consent to judge our little dancing contest. It will start in just a moment. Seats are reserved for you up near the orchestra."

Behind the Naval party hovered beaming Shorty Sullivan, Gladland's press agent. He had with difficulty lured the gold-braided contingent there. It was his biggest coup of the year and he was very proud of himself.

The cavalcade passed. Eddie Briggs put an expert arm around Mamie and they danced off. He had not noticed her face particularly when he invited her on the floor. He had simply seized the first girl in sight. He had wanted to show that red headed charmer that his heart was not broken. Then, too, he did not intend to let Redhead get very far out of his sight this time. And he was frankly suspicious of Searchlight.

He now looked down for the first time into Mamie's face and saw that she was thin, wan and dull looking. His dancing became mere routine. His eyes roamed the milling crowd on the floor for Peachy. His vision otherwise occupied, his course across the dance floor was erratic and he frequently bumped his partner into other couples. Her pleasure at being picked by him vanished. He was a careless dancer and he was paying no attention to her whatever. She frowned up at him, became angry. She would have called him

down if the rules had not forbidden it. Peachy danced by, her partner pressing her very closely and talking earnestly into her ear. Eddie followed her like a magnet. Perhaps his partner could tell him something about her. He leaned down.

"That red headed girl has sure got the boys dizzy about her," he commented in what he fancied was an offhand manner.

So that was it, thought Mamie. Peachy was up to her usual tricks, monopolizing all the men in the place. Loyal as Mamie was to Peachy, she could not help but feel momentarily resentful.

"Don't let your imagination run wild," said Mamie curtly. "Peachy's nice to everybody, but it doesn't mean anything. It's all a business to her. Why, she won't even let any of the boys take her home from here."

"Is that so?" commented Eddie. "Well, she may change her mind!"

Meantime, Peachy was having troubles of her own. Searchlight was a very bad, clumsy dancer. His attempts to become familiar were even clumsier and more determined. She had continually to push herself away from his tight embrace and to parry his intimate remarks. Though she treated him well and danced beautifully, Doyle had a baffled feeling that he was not succeeding at all in establishing his relations with her on a satisfactory basis. Finally he played his trump card. He put his face very close to her ear. He lifted his left hand, holding hers, up to her eyes.

"See this ring?" he whispered. "I've been waiting a long time to give it to the right girl, somebody who will show her appreciation——"

"I'd appreciate it—a lot," Peachy replied promptly. Too promptly to make it significant or promising to Searchlight.

"No, you don't get me, baby," he insisted. "First you'd have to be very, very nice to me, promise to be my girl."

Peachy laughed, pretending that she did not understand. She was used to such proposals. They did not disturb her. They merely made it a little more difficult for her to outwit the men who offered them.

"Come on," urged Searchlight. "What do you say?"

She smiled at him, wide eyed.

"My, you're a fast worker," she countered. "I don't have to make up my mind right now, do I?"

"Sure you do," he insisted. "I got to be back aboard the ship in a few hours, though I wouldn't mind being late and spendin' some time in the brig for a swell dame like you. What do you say, baby? Are you——"

A sudden deafening rolling of drums and crashing of cymbals by the orchestra interrupted Searchlight's line. The music abruptly ceased. He was about to resume his advances when Peachy caught him by the arm and drew him toward the platform occupied by the orchestra.

"Come on," she cried. "The dancing contest is

going to begin. We should have a good chance of winning the cup."

"Aw, what do you care about a cup?" he protested. "First, answer——"

But all the dancers were now pushing their way up toward the orchestra. Peachy and her sailor were swept along with the tide. Jake Kiernan and the three naval officers whom he had so obsequiously welcomed to the hall were waiting on the raised structure. Near them on a table stood a large silver cup glistening in the bright lights. Four uniformed attendants of the dance hall carrying in their hands cardboard signs with huge numbers on them were marshalled nearby under Shorty Sullivan's direction.

On the opposite side of the hall from Peachy and her escort, Eddie Briggs had also heard the signal from the orchestra that indicated the impending contest. His eyes darted around the hall and picked up the red head. He stopped dancing at once and fairly flung his partner through the crowd in order to win a position near Peachy in front of the platform. By the time Proprietor Kiernan had cleared his throat and was about to speak, Eddie, by adroit dodging and sidestepping had attained the red headed girl's side and was between her and his own partner. Her eyes on Kiernan, she was unaware of Eddie's presence.

"In honor of the brave boys from the fleet," Kiernan was announcing in his most unctuous tones, "we are staging tonight a special dancing contest. This beautiful cup will be awarded to the winners. The

judges will be these distinguished officers. The contest will be a moonlight waltz, with the celebrated Gladland lighting effects."

He gave the signal to the orchestra. They struck the opening chord of one of the popular, velvety waltz tunes of the day. At the same time a portion of the lights were extinguished and the hall was plunged into semi-darkness.

Eddie Briggs seized the opportunity at once. Slipping behind Peachy and drawing her elbow so that she faced away from Searchlight, he boldly placed his arm around her and danced off with her. He carefully averted his face from hers. In the darkness and the confusion of many couples getting under way around them, she was unaware of the substitution.

Neither was Doyle, who, looking about and finding Peachy no longer by his side, concluded that they had become momentarily separated in the darkened confusion. Seeing a lone girl standing a few paces away, he mistook Mamie for his partner and without a word started dancing with her.

Attendants were hurrying in and out among the dancers hanging numbers around the necks of the men. The plans had slightly miscarried; the lights had been put out too quickly, before the assigning of numbers.

Red, white and blue searchlights, suspended from the ceiling of the hall, darted in and out among the dancers. Eddie made sure to avoid their revealing beams.

Peachy, meantime, wondered vaguely as she danced at the sudden grace and animation that seemed to have seized her previously clumsy partner and also why he had abandoned his talk about the ring. She was not content to drop this matter of the dazzling circlet. The ring was a beauty. She was determined to possess it and had confidence enough in herself to believe she could avoid meeting any embarrassing demands which he might make in connection with it.

"Why don't you try letting me wear the ring a while and see how nice I would be to you?" she suggested softly.

Eddie's quiet smile of triumph faded. So, Searchlight had been making some headway after all. So, that was the kind of a girl this redhead was! All right. That made it easier. He could treat her in the same materialistic way that he did the other girls. And he had been silly enough to believe she was different. He tightened his grip upon her and drew her closer. His action and his silence caused her to look up into his face, questioning. At the same moment the rays of a white spotlight streamed brightly between them. She stared, uttered an exclamation of anger and annoyance. She pushed herself at arms' length away from him.

"How do *you* happen to be my partner?" she snapped.

"I'm awfully sorry," replied Eddie, affecting innocence. "I must have become confused in the dark."

"That's the bunk," she said scornfully.

"We might as well dance on," he suggested brightly. "Neither of us could locate our partners with the lights out."

She hesitated. What he said about the possibility of finding the other sailor in that shadowy mob was true. Moreover, he was evidently an excellent dancer. And, although she would not admit it, there was a thrill in dancing with this youth who had so persistently pursued her that intrigued her. She permitted him to draw her toward him in a dancing posture again.

"I might have won the contest with the other man," she complained. "He was a good dancer. I haven't a chance of getting the cup with you."

"Applesauce, cutie," replied Eddie promptly. "Searchlight's an elephant. I'm a nifty galloper, and you know it."

As if in league with this fresh gob, one of the Gladland's attendants now glided up and slipped a number around Eddie's neck. The attendant spoke to Peachy as he left.

"How did you get rid of the truck with two left wheels?" said he. "You two ought to clean up now."

Eddie grinned broadly down at her.

"That bird knows class when he sees it," Eddie said.

"You probably framed it with him to say that," frowned Peachy.

But she was secretly not altogether displeased. Her new partner *was* about the best male dancer in the room. She was not altogether modest about her own

terpsichorean talents. And that big, shiny cup would look fine in her apartment. She concentrated her lithe body upon dancing as gracefully as she knew how. Eddie did likewise. But he could not help wondering just how far Doyle had gone with her. It would serve as a guide to his own future conduct.

"So Searchlight was giving you his regular line, was he?" encouraged Eddie tentatively.

She looked sharply up at him. Darn him, he was so aggressive, cocksure, conceited. He seemed to think any girl would be foolish to listen to any man except himself.

"Well, what of it?" she asked belligerently.

"Nothing," said Eddie. "Only I wouldn't take him seriously if I were you. He always has a supply of those phoney rings. And wearing one of them means only one thing to anybody in the fleet—that girl is entirely his and the other boys should lay off or fight."

"I would have taken the ring if I thought it would scare *you* off," she answered promptly.

"What a friendly little ball of fire you are, sister!" said Eddie, not at all perturbed.

He pressed her more tightly toward him and executed a few fancy steps. She allowed this liberty for a few moments. She found herself, to her own disgust, rather liking it. Then she squirmed away and affected dignity.

"Loosen up, big boy," she ordered vehemently. "I

have to like a man pretty well to stand for that stuff —and I don't like you."

She so evidently meant it that Eddie was abashed. He held her off almost at arms' length. They danced on in this condition of armed neutrality for several minutes. The lights flashed on. They circled the hall several times, passing the judges' platform. They had not noticed that all the other dancers had by this time been waved off the floor and were gathered around the edges of the dance hall watching them. An attendant appeared and took Peachy by the arm. Both looked at him, startled and disappointed, believing they were being eliminated from the contest. The attendant grinned broadly.

"You two win," he said.

Applause burst out all over the hall. They looked unbelievedly toward the platform, and an officer holding the giant cup in his hand was beckoning them. Eddie took her arm politely and escorted her over to the judges. The officer with the cup raised his hand for quiet. The hand-clapping stopped.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said the naval man. "It was difficult to choose the winner from among so many fine dancers. We finally picked this couple because of their grace and dignity and propriety." He handed the cup over to the blushing Peachy. "I am happy to give this cup to such a charming dancer," added the officer, not without a glance of admiration at her flushed beauty.

The chief judge shook hands with Eddie.

"I congratulate you upon your very gentlemanly conduct," said the officer.

"Thank you, sir," replied Eddie, still in somewhat of a daze.

They walked off the floor. As they passed the entrance gate, Eddie was aware of the face of Searchlight, livid with anger. The latter had long since left the floor, forgetting all politeness and restraint at discovering the trickery that had placed the wan faced Mamie in his arms in place of Peachy. Eddie avoided him, anxious now only to follow up the lucky break that had brought the redhead and him together. But the next moment revealed how over-optimistic he was.

As the orchestra struck up a lively fox trot, the other dancers swung out upon the floor and he and Peachy were quite alone near the ticket booth. He suggested, "Now that we've copped the cup, baby, how about you and me beating it together? I know a nice little place where——"

"Not for a million dollars!" she cried angrily.

She glared at him and, turning abruptly, left him flat and sailed into the hostesses' rest room.

She stood in front of a mirror restoring order to her slightly tousled red bobbed locks. Babe, the big blonde hostess, passed behind her and paused.

"Well, you had your luck with you tonight, dearie," drawled Babe. "Trust you to pick the swellest dancer and the best looker on the floor."

Peachy stopped her deft operations on her hair for

a moment. A thoughtful and softened expression came into her face. Was Babe right? She couldn't be. No gob had ever acted that fresh with her before. He deserved a lesson. She stiffened.

"Don't get that sailor wrong," insisted Peachy. "He may be good looking but he's an awful egg. But there's another one out there with the best looking ring I ever saw. Watch me work on him!"

Smiling shrewdly to herself, she started renewing the carmine make-up on her full rich lips.

CHAPTER VIII

A LESS whole heartedly optimistic young man than Eddie Briggs, following his second repulse by the red headed hostess of Gladland, might have concluded that he perhaps knew slightly less about women than he had believed he did. He might even have become a mite discouraged.

But Eddie, leaning thoughtfully on the rail surrounding the dance floor, was not downcast. He was puzzled. He simply could not imagine why, after Peachy had danced with him and listened to him and won the cup through him, she had now walked out on him and with such a tart exit speech. He was even more determined than ever to win her. He saw now that this could not be done with the high handed, loud talking tactics that served with most girls. He must convey the idea to her that he was a very unusual and desirable fellow by some other method than just telling her so. He set about devising a scheme along this line.

His eyes swept around the room for a possible hint. His glance fell upon a familiar face. Ever since first sighting Peachy at Gladland, he had lost sight of his pal, Al Pearce. He now perceived the raw boned and

ruddy features of his chum at one of the nearby refreshment tables that lined the outside of the rail all around the room. Al was talking earnestly to a snub nosed, freckle-faced little hostess who sat opposite him. Two fruit lemonades, from which Al and his companion quaffed through straws during lulls in their conversation, stood on the table between them. This was quite evidently the Gladland girl about whom Al had told Eddie en route to shore.

Eddie watched his chum's actions with the tolerant, amused interest that a polished professional takes in the work of a tyro. Al, Eddie was forced to admit, seemed to be going very well. A silly grin on his face, the tall sailor was saying heavy-handed pleasantries to the girl and she was encouraging him by giggling and making little gestures that indicated he was certainly a card. But, their drinks finished, the sailor evidently decided that the time had come for serious business. He leaned over confidentially toward the girl and motioned her toward him. The grin had left Al's face. His tablemate obliged by resting her elbows on the table and bringing her ear close to his mouth. He whispered rapidly to her. Instantly she sat up very straight and a look of disgust flushed her face. She stared at him angrily. Out of nowhere her right hand flashed swiftly through the air and she dealt the enterprising Al a resounding whack across the cheek with her open palm. He recoiled, started to say something. But he had no chance. The girl had risen and disap-

peared. Al sat still, open mouthed, slowly rubbing his reddened cheek.

At the unexpected denouement of Al's tête-à-tête, Eddie emitted a snort of laughter. He was used to laughing at the disasters which befell the blunt Al in his encounters with women. Moreover, it was consoling to Eddie at this particular time to observe somebody else being even more violently mistreated by a girl than he himself had been. It soothed his injured vanity.

But a sudden thought struck him as he watched the chagrined Al ruefully paying the check. Perhaps his awkward chum could be of use to him. He walked over to Pearce, who was replacing his change in his blouse pocket. Al looked belligerently up to him as he approached.

"What's the matter, Al?" asked Eddie blithely. "Wouldn't she talk turkey?"

"All these dames want is for a guy to buy 'em lemonade and hand out dance tickets," exclaimed Al disgustedly. "When you try and get friendly, they hit you a bat in the eye, like they was the Queen of Sheba or somebody."

Ordinarily Eddie would have ragged him, but now he had resolved to make use of the thwarted Romeo, and consoled him instead.

"Don't you care, big boy," Ed patted him on the shoulder. "There's plenty of more where she came from. Meantime, how about doing me a little favor?"

"Such as which?" Al inquired.

Eddie slid into the chair opposite his friend and hitched it around the table until they were close together.

"Listen, I'm trying to make a hit with the redhead and I'm not getting anywhere," he said confidentially. "I want her to believe I'm a great guy and you can help me. Nail her for a dance and then bring her over to this table. Get fresh with her and then I'll rush in and do the rescue act. See? It's a cinch."

"Nothin' doin'," replied Al promptly. "I got socked by one dame already and that's plenty."

Eddie pulled out a tightly wrapped roll of bills from his pocket.

"A buck for pulling the gag and five more if it goes over," he tempted. "Besides you ought to do it for me, Al. Remember the swell jane I lined you up with in Shanghai. Remember all the dough I lent you on this cruise and didn't ask for back—yet."

Al hesitated.

"Say, Peachy wouldn't dance with me," he objected in a moment of candor. "Every gob in the place is after her."

"She'll dance with the man with the most tickets," said Eddie. "I'll buy you a fist full. Come on."

He fairly hauled the reluctant Al to his feet and guided him over to the ticket office. He purchased a dollar's worth of coupons and thrust them into Al's hand.

"Stand here by the dressing room door and flash them into Peachy's face," ordered Eddie. "Stick them

into her hand if you have to. But hurry up. She'll be coming out soon."

The music had struck up again. The dancers were moving toward the floor. Eddie left Al by the door to the hostesses' dressing room and fell back into the crowd watchfully.

Al waited awkwardly. Several hostesses came out and were greeted by waiting partners. Pearce had begun to think Peachy had passed up this dance, when she appeared, pretty and smiling as ever. She looked around appraisingly. Several sailors, waving tickets, immediately flocked up to her. Al was in the van. He had more tickets than anybody. He waved them to her and then, seeing that he had her attention, strode boldly up and pushed the coupons into her hand.

"Let's go, Peachy," he greeted her. "You remember me—Al Pearce."

She remembered him. She remembered that he was a terrible dancer. But the dollar's worth of tickets appealed to her. And it might as well be he as the next gob. Anybody as long as it wasn't that fresh sailor who had won the cup with her. She gave Al a warm, intimate smile.

"Of course I remember you, Al," she flattered. "You're sure looking fine and husky."

She gave him her arm.

"You must be tired, and it's hot," suggested Al. "Suppose we step over for a little drink instead of dancing."

This appealed to her at once. She *was* tired and

A Paramount Picture. The Fleet's In.

EDDIE TRIES TO ADD ANOTHER TO HIS COLLECTION.

thirsty. And she did not relish a tour of the floor with this clumsy footed partner. She permitted herself to be led to a table in a corner. They sat down. Al called a waiter. From a neighboring table, hidden by a post, Eddie watched them expectantly.

Both Peachy and Al ordered fruit lemonade and they sipped it silently. Eddie began to grow uneasy. Why didn't that big bimbo get working? Al looked worriedly around and caught Eddie's eye. The latter made motions for the act to begin. Al swallowed hard.

"Gee, you're looking great, Peachy," he began at the same time sliding his chair around the table nearer to her. "I always did like you better than all the others."

"That's nice," smiled Peachy, drawing the last of her cooling lemonade through her straw. "Gee, that drink tastes good."

Al's chair was now touching hers and she was watching him guardedly from behind smiling blue eyes. His arm stole around the back of her chair. She looked down at it, frowned and made a motion to edge her chair away. Suddenly he wrapped his long arm around her, drew her to him and made a badly aimed attempt to kiss her. She turned sharply away from him, put up her shoulder and the kiss landed on her elbow. She tried to rise, but he held her tightly to him. She cried out angrily and struggled to wrest herself from his embrace and scramble to her feet. He clung to her, still making a wild, absurd attempt to

kiss her. She was fighting like a wildcat now, enraged that any man should think he could get away with such barefaced liberties as this. Though his arms were like steel, the force of her counter-attack at length carried both of them to their feet.

At that moment Eddie, the hero, made his spectacular and very opportune entrance. He rushed in like whirlwind and, seizing the tenacious Al from behind, spun him away from Peachy, and almost off his feet.

"Fight me," Eddie whispered hoarsely into the panting Al's ear.

Al obediently rushed at him with closed fists. They sparred vigorously back and forth, knocking over chairs and sending the two lemonade glasses crashing to the floor. Instantly the place was in an uproar. Hostesses were clustered near, emitting little screams and thoroughly enjoying the brawl. Several gobs hurdled the railing and came running, eager to join the melee. Fortunately the officers who had judged the dancing contest had departed. Peachy stood just behind Eddie, her eyes bright with excitement, her red bobbed hair still tousled from her encounter with Al Pearce.

Sailors joined the fight, most of them siding with Al on the principle that the under-dog always needs the most help. Eddie's prowess with his fists was as well known as his ability with women. Finally Briggs delivered a right to Al's jaw that was more a push than a solid punch and the latter went tumbling to the

floor. Before he could scramble to his feet again, Jake Kiernan arrived with four attendants, who also served in the capacity of bouncers. They descended upon Al and Eddie. Two of them grabbed each of the battling gobs and started pushing them, kicking and struggling, to the back entrance of Gladland.

Peachy rushed upon Jake Kiernan and clutched at his arm. She pointed to Eddie, en route to the air.

"Don't throw him out," she urged frantically. "The other man insulted me and he was just trying to protect me against him."

"Can't help it, Peachy," said Kiernan over his shoulder. "Everybody who fights in here has got to leave. Only way I can satisfy the cops. This place has a good reputation and we can't afford to have trouble."

In spite of Peachy's pleas, the exodus of both contenders continued. The throng of hostesses and sailors followed them, shouting and milling around. The tolhead joined the camp followers, her eyes on Eddie. They were half admiring instead of angry eyes now. He was a regular fellow after all. He was being ejected from Gladland on account of her and he was taking it like a man. He might even have been arrested for what he did. She tried to break through the crowd and speak to him, to tell him she was grateful. But the bodies were massed too tightly in front of her.

Finally the attendants reached the open back door of the dance hall and fairly flung their troublesome

burdens out. The sailors landed at the foot of a clump of bushes on the smooth lawn of the little park that stretched from the rear of Gladland to the sidewalk. One of the bouncers slammed the door shut and Kiernan's emergency crew, with grins of satisfaction over work well done, turned back to their less strenuous duties. The dancers stood for a moment by the door discussing the fight in loud terms. One of the principal talkers was Doyle. He had vainly tried to get by Peachy's side during the journey to the door. He wanted to tell her that he could easily vanquish both Eddie and Al with one hand if she would only say the word. The music now struck up. The dancers streamed slowly back to the floor. The late belligerents were forgotten.

Peachy, however, did not forget. She stood uncertainly by the door. She had an impulse to rush out and ascertain if her protector were hurt. Pride held her back. She would feel like such a fool—fighting with him one moment and thanking him the next. It was in this mood of hesitancy that Searchlight, barging up with his chest out, found her.

"Why didn't you call for *me* when that guy insulted you?" he demanded. "I would have busted him wide open."

"I had plenty of help as it was," she said thoughtfully.

"That Eddie Briggs—bah!" said Searchlight scornfully. "A swell help he'd be if anything real got after you. What you need is the protection of a guy like me.

What do you say, kid? Here's the ring—I'm still offerin' it to you."

He held out his hand under her eyes and exhibited the precious bauble glinting under the lights.

She shook her head. Then, on an impulse, she pushed him aside and fairly ran to the dressing room.

The blonde Babe was trying to coax a curl into her straw-colored locks in front of a mirror when Peachy entered breathlessly.

"Well, where's that ring you had your eyes on?" drawled Babe.

"Haven't got it," replied Peachy, snatching her hat off its hook. "I've changed my mind about that. I don't want it."

Babe laughed mirthlessly.

"Yes, you *have*," she chuckled sarcastically. "Don't kid me. If you want it, you'll get it. You're a natural born gold digger. Gold digging is in your blood, just like dancing is in your feet."

Peachy had pulled on her hat and had picked up the big, shiny silver cup which she and Eddie had won. She started hurriedly toward the door.

"No use explaining to you what's happened," she flung back at Babe. "You wouldn't understand. But rings don't mean a thing to me right now."

Searchlight was waiting for her at the door. He tried to grab her as she flew past.

"Wait a minute, cutie—got something to tell you," he flung out at her.

She snatched herself away from him.

"Go get Babe," she snapped at him. "She'll take your ring."

She reached the rear door of the dance hall and flung it open. She peered anxiously out into the darkness. The typical thin fog of a San Francisco night was enveloping the little park. But down the path leading from the door, some fifty yards away, she saw the broad back of a slowly walking figure in the Navy blue. The shoulders were slumped a little, as if their owner was discouraged.

Without a word her fleet feet hit the gravel of the path and she ran after the retreating sailor.

CHAPTER IX

When Signalman Briggs and Seaman Pearce, U.S.N., landed in two blue dishevelled heaps on the grass of the little park just outside the back door of Gladland, having been heaved there by four husky bouncers, they lay for a moment in silent meditation. Neither was seriously hurt in body, though the dignity of each had suffered a grave wound. Al was the first to speak and did so from the depths of an afflicted heart and slightly bruised chest.

"A swell mess you got us both in," he complained. "Especially me. I take a clawin' from that wild female and a punch in the jaw from you and now get kicked out on my ear in the bargain. All for a buck. It ain't worth it."

Eddie Briggs sat up ruefully and reached over to reclaim his white hat, which one of Gladland's attendants had hurled out of the door after him.

"*You* should worry," retorted Eddie. "I queered myself with the girl, that's the important thing. It's just as well, I guess. If a dame will let a fellow fight for her and get bounced out for it and never raise her hand to help him, she doesn't make much of a hit with me."

Eddie half believed this, and the other half of his heated statement was sour grapes.

"Well, what are we goin' to do now?" demanded Al, scrambling to his feet. "Let's go down to that other dance hall, Rose Gardens. It's just as good as this joint. I know a couple of swell janes down there."

Eddie shook his head. "Nope. I'm through dance halling for the evening. I'm going back to the ship."

"What—at eleven o'clock! And your liberty ain't up till one?" scoffed Al in amazement. "Double Duty Duffy'll drop dead!"

"I wish he would," grinned Ed. "Anyhow I'll give him a chance. If you're set on inflicting yourself on another trot palace, so long!"

"O.K.," replied Al, somewhat disgruntled. "See you later." In a few seconds he had disappeared into the fog, bound for Rose Gardens and further adventure.

Eddie arose, smoothed out his rumpled attire and, with a sigh, started down the blue stoned path toward the street. He walked slowly and a little saggily. He was reflecting upon the vagaries of the female sex, notably one of its members, named Peachy. Gee, he had thought her a good sport, whatever else she was. What was the use of being a knight errant, a protector of outraged womanhood, if the recipient of one's gallantry didn't appreciate it, indeed even joined forces with the enemy? Well, he supposed he would never see her again. And she sure was a good looker. How

he would like to put his arms around that trim waist and kiss those rich, pouty lips.

He stopped suddenly as a little feminine cry sounded in back of him. It was a rather indefinite and timid call, but it was unmistakably meant for his ears. He hesitated and turned. There, incredibly, coming toward him was the red headed hostess, a tight pink hat covering her auburn tresses and a huge silver cup under her right arm. He waited, wondering, pulses pounding. She was smiling and shy as she approached.

"Hello," he said uncertainly when she had reached his side.

"Hello," she replied. "I just—wanted to thank you—for what you did for me. I'm awfully sorry—they threw you out."

At once it was to Eddie as if the fog had cleared and the sun was miraculously shining bright and clear right there at eleven o'clock at night. His pride returned. His self-confidence came back with a rush. He threw back his shoulders and posed a little.

"Oh, that's all right," he said. "Where are you bound now?"

"Well," she hesitated, "I was on my way home."

"Mind if I walk along?"

"That would be nice."

They stood there looking into each other's eyes. Eddie boldly and calculatingly, Peachy with an unaccustomed shyness. He did not appreciate the fact that this was a very decisive step for her. She had

always previously abandoned Gladland and its associates abruptly at the door of the dance hall. She had never thought of the establishment or any of its devotees as anything but means of making much needed money. She sold her physical charms for a nickel a dance, but the bargain ceased when she left the dance floor. She took it for granted that all of her male partners were as materialistic in their purpose as was she herself. None of her experience had ever tended to make her change her view.

But this good looking sailor somehow seemed different. From the first she had been attracted to him. Now he had risked arrest to do battle for her. He evidently regarded her in a much deeper way than merely as a pretty girl. She returned the feeling. She would show her appreciation by letting him escort her home. But it was an unprecedented and, in a way, dangerous thing for her to do. It meant breaking down a barrier which had protected her for over a year. She was a little uneasy.

They looked at each other and finally Eddie laughed happily. She joined frankly in his mirth. The ice was broken. She took his arm and they walked down the path together.

"What's your name, Peachy?" he asked breezily.

"What's yours, Eddie?" she retorted.

"How do you know my name?"

"Your friend Mr. Doyle told me."

"You want to stay away from that bimbo. He's no good."

"Is that so? It's funny. He said the same thing about you."

They laughed again. He pressed her arm and she snuggled more closely to him. She tried to persuade herself that the fog was damp and penetrating and that she was cold. But she enjoyed the contact of his husky arm against hers. Her guard for the first time in a year was dropped. The reserved, scoffing Peachy was in imminent peril of falling in love with a sailor, she knew, and she was almost glad of it.

They turned out of the path down a street lined with trees that were whispering softly in the breeze blowing the wraith-like fog in from the Bay. They passed a lone figure, a woebegone little sailor, leaning up against the trunk of a tall eucalyptus tree.

"Hello, Parker," said Eddie cheerfully.

"Hello, Eddie," returned the diminutive gob and his voice was very sad and discouraged indeed. So much so that Eddie turned his head back and regarded him intently. When they had gone on a few paces, Eddie stopped and said to Peachy, "Wait a minute, will you?" And he went back to the solitary youth under the eucalyptus. She waited, watching the two. They conversed briefly. Eddie put his hand in his shallow blouse pocket and drew out a roll of bills. He peeled off two and handed them to the little gob. The latter cheered up immediately, pocketed the money and fairly skipped off with glee. Eddie grinned after him and was still grinning when he returned to her.

"What was the matter with him?" she asked.

"He had a date with a girl and he lost his money," Eddie explained.

"And you lent him some?"

"Sure, he's off my ship," Eddie replied, surprised that she should consider it a matter of any importance. With the allowance he received from his father added to his Navy pay, he always had more money than his fellows. He was continually lending and almost never getting it back.

"You're very generous," commented Peachy, looking at him admiringly with very bright blue eyes. She was now quite thoroughly under his spell. Whole hearted generosity always made a tremendous appeal to her; she had encountered so little of it.

They had been walking down the tree-roofed sidewalk of a quiet residential street. They now turned the corner into one of the brightly lighted business sections that one comes upon unawares in San Francisco. It was Saturday night and most of the stores were still going full blast. The red and white electrics of a motion picture theatre marquise blinked just over their heads. They stopped in front of an ice cream parlor and went in and had sodas on high stools at the counter. A spotlight played upon a gilt frame holding a collection of snapshots outside the cheap little photograph gallery next door, as they came out of the refreshment parlor, laughing and talking intimately.

"You ought to have your picture taken with that cup," suggested Eddie. "You'd look great."

He recognized the establishment. He had been there before.

"That would be nice—you and me and the cup," she agreed.

They went in. The place seemed to be deserted. It contained a few battered lights on wheels and a veteran collection of crude props such as dummy horses, a tinny automobile, a rowboat and an airplane in which the customers posed for pictures. Samples of the shop's picture-making art adorned the walls. Eventually a shaggy haired, stoop shouldered old man appeared from the rear of the shop, like a character out of Dickens.

"Did you want something?" he inquired rather grouchily, evidently not too well pleased at being disturbed so late at night.

"Sure, we want our pictures taken," sang out Eddie. "Did you think we came in to buy the place?"

"The airyoplane makes a nice background," suggested the photographer, fooling around with his lights.

"Nix on that cheap stuff," scoffed Eddie. "Give us a couple of chairs."

The old man muttered something but finally produced the chairs. The gilt paint had peeled from them. They were lightweight and rickety, but they would do.

"Sit down," Eddie instructed Peachy and she indulgently obeyed. He took his position in the chair next

to her and hitched it up close to her. The photographer jerked up his camera and bent rheumatically behind it to get the focus.

"Put your arms around me," commanded Eddie boldly. She frowned a little but finally gave in. She looked up at him with uneasy eyes. He sat stiffly in his chair, hands on his knees, gazed cockily ahead into the camera. It was his favorite pose, the pose featured in the pictures which he even then had in his blouse and had shown Doyle earlier in the evening. He wanted to add this red headed beauty to his collection.

But the proprietor of the gallery was not satisfied with the pose. He lifted the black hood from his gray locks and walked over from behind the camera. The ancient had devoted a lifetime to the snapshot art and he took it very seriously.

"That won't make a good picture," he protested. "Take your arms down, young lady."

Peachy, who thought the pose somewhat cheap and over-familiar herself, obeyed with alacrity. Eddie was annoyed.

"Listen, old timer," he ordered petulantly to the gallery man, "You look after the camera and I'll take care of the posing."

The graybeard shook his head and regarded Eddie disapprovingly with near-sighted eyes blinking from over old-fashioned square-lensed spectacles.

"I have been posing people for thirty years," he protested. "Come over here and look at these."

He motioned them toward a center table upon which

was a little pile of dusty photographs. In spite of their lack of interest, they humored the old man and inspected the snapshots which he proudly handed them one by one.

"If the couple are engaged and an attitude of familiarity is desired," he cackled primly, "the young gentleman should always be the aggressor. Here, for instance, is a very nicely posed photograph."

He handed the approved model to Eddie. The latter looked at it, stared, blushed and darted a quick glance at Peachy. She as busy with another picture which the proprietor had pressed into her hand. Eddie gulped with relief. He cast a wary second look at the photo in his hand. It boldly displayed none other than himself with his arms around a large and simpering blonde. The girl was a telephone operator in the Hotel St. Thomas whom he had met on his last sojourn in San Francisco. Their parting, which had taken place on that very street, had not been exactly pleasant. They had bumped into her husband just outside the photograph gallery. Eddie hastily shoved the picture on the bottom of the pile and abruptly took Peachy by the arm.

"We'll have it done my way or not at all," he snapped to the cameraman. Then, detecting a slight stiffening of her arm and an inquiring look from her blue eyes, he added, "Won't we, Peachy? Come on, be a sport?"

She hesitated, tossed her head and smiled, "Anything to please you, big boy."

"Is that a promise?" he came back swiftly in a low voice.

"I never make promises," she fenced.

But she allowed him to lead her back to the chipped gilt chairs in front of the ugly gray drop, with its impossible birds and fountain. She obligingly sat the silver cup at her feet, put her arms around him, a little gingerly to be sure, and looked up at him. He stared straight ahead into the camera and bade the disapproving gaffer snap the picture. After an interminable period of pushing plates in and out of the camera, the latter commanded quiet and squeezed the bulb.

They were obliged to kill twenty precious moments while the photographer performed mysterious rites with the plate in a dark room. They were rewarded by being presented with two slightly light-struck prints. The finished product made Peachy vaguely uneasy. Why had he asked her to assume such a suppliant and ridiculous pose? As if she were adoring him and he was taking her worship as only his due. It reminded her of the scenes in the Sunday newspaper rotogravure section of that African explorer whose favorite gesture was to place one foot upon the head of a lion he had shot and then stand there triumphantly, arms akimbo. She could imagine the mocking eyes of Bob Steele laughing at the picture.

"Great, aren't they, kid?" Eddie was admiring his handiwork. She nodded tolerantly. He peeled a bill from his roll, reconciling the old proprietor with some extra change.

When they had reached the sidewalk again, she said decisively, "I really have to get home. I always go directly from the dance hall."

"O.K.," he agreed. "You lead the way."

The journey led to the hill section, where cable cars clanked and toiled with their loads up steep, cobble-stoned grades. They turned into one of those sloping streets and started ascending. When they had covered three or four blocks and Eddie had begun to wonder how much more of this breath-taking pedestrianism there was to do, she cried, "Here we are! I live up those steps."

He looked up and almost groaned aloud. The street had ended, evidently because no man-made machine was capable of navigating the almost vertical path that looked ahead of them. The continuation of the highway was a long flight of precipitous stone steps, leading to an even higher level.

"Tired?" she taunted. And when he vigorously denied it, she cried, "Come on, then. I'll race you."

She sprang away, twinkling up the steps with amazing speed. The motion caused her scant, short skirt to ride perilously above her knees. The silk of her legs shone in the rays of the arc light swinging overhead. Eddie stood watching her appreciatively for an instant, then, with a whoop, followed her. After a breathless pursuit, which recalled the day he had recklessly started to ascend the Washington Monument when his ship had visited the capital, he caught up with her at the top of the steps. Both stood there, frankly

panting. She had taken off her hat and the ends of her warm, ruddy locks were curled damply over her forehead. Her cheeks were flushed but little white patches showed under her eyes. She had had a hard day and she was quite exhausted.

Now for the first time he noticed the weather-beaten bulk of a tall and somewhat shabby apartment house looming on their right. She turned and led the way to the door. It was not locked. They stepped into a long hall. More long and well worn wooden stairs rose into the upper stories. He secretly prayed that she lived on the bottom floor. But she stopped at the foot of the stairs and leaned against the wall a moment, smiling at him. She did not relish the climb ahead.

"I'll carry you," Eddie offered promptly. Ever since he had held her close to him in that glorious dance in the dark, he had wanted to feel that soft, beautiful young body against his again.

"Oh, I'm not a cripple," she answered.

But she made only a slight and conventional protest when he abruptly seized her under the knees and lifted her. She sagged against him almost with relief. Her soft breath was on his cheek. The perfume of her hair intoxicated him. He hardly noticed that he was making progress up the long flight of stairs. At the top he set her down, sure now that they had reached their destination.

"Am I too heavy?" she asked him slyly at once, and

he knew that there were still more stairs to be covered.

His answer was to lift her with even more alacrity than before and start up the second flight. Her bare white arms were, innocently enough, about his neck. She smiled and ruffled his hair. It was too much for him. He bent his head abruptly and tried to reach her red mouth with his lips. But his action was too precipitous and unexpected to please her. She drew her face away from his eager advances.

"You mustn't do that," she reproved gravely, pressing a finger against his adventuresome lips.

A sudden foreboding clutched at her. What was she doing in the arms of this almost stranger anyway, a sailor at that? And feeling so drowsily contented and helpless in his embrace? How did she know that he reciprocated the very real affection for him that had sprung out of nowhere and suffused her whole being? This something that she had never before felt for any man and had vowed she never would feel?

Before she had time to give voice and action to her uneasiness, they had attained the second landing and he had set her down. She looked into his face inquiringly. He laughed down at her. Clean cut, handsome, so at peace with the world. So obviously well bred in spite of his outward swagger and salty talk. Her doubts were swept away. She piloted him down the dimly lighted hallway and stopped in front of a door in the rear. He held the silver cup in his hand

while she fumbled in her hand bag, produced a key and opened the door. They entered together. He closed the door behind them.

It was a modestly furnished living room that looked as if it had been occupied a long time by the same family. Old fashioned oval topped table with a deep drawer—a large, comfortable couch sagging a little in the middle, two over-stuffed easy chairs—a few straight chairs, plain but of good quality, and an ancient grandfather's clock in the corner.

She looked at him anxiously, as if afraid he had anticipated something more sumptuous.

"Oh, boy!" he exclaimed gratefully and sank down in a corner of the spacious couch and invited her with his eyes to join him.

"I'll put this stuff away," she smiled, indicating the cup, her hat and her handbag. "I'll only be a minute."

She disappeared through the door that led out of the living room on the left. He lit a cigarette and surveyed the room idly, though without seeing much. He was tingling with anticipation. All that had gone before was a necessary preparation, a means of bringing this red headed pippin and himself together, alone, in some secluded spot. The fact that she had come back to him after he believed her gone forever, that she so plainly liked him, was just a lucky break. His usual lucky break. Girls were easy—he always got them all.

Signalman Edward Briggs thought very highly of

himself, sprawling in that soft couch, smoking a cigarette and blowing the smoke away in the grand manner, at fifteen minutes before midnight. In love? He would have stared at you blankly if you had suggested it. He didn't fall in love with girls. He had simply arrived at the end of a long and rather difficult hunt. The beauty and desirability of the object he had hunted made the arduousness of the siege worth while. Now the delightful and long awaited climax was approaching. He squeezed his cigarette against the brass side of an oval ash-tray and arose.

Why was she taking so long? Or wasn't she coming out at all? He made a circuit of the room slowly, whistling softly to himself. He tentatively pushed on the door on the other side of the room and found himself in an immaculately kept little kitchen, its furnishings revealing themselves clearly in the eerie moonlight that had penetrated the fog. He returned to the living room. She was still not there. Was she waiting for him?

He determined upon a bold course at any cost. He walked quickly across the room and opened the door through which Peachy had disappeared. In the dim light he saw that it was a bedroom. Directly in front of him was the low four-poster bed. A huddled figure was lying on it, under the sheets. Eddie smiled and started forward.

Suddenly the prone figure on the bed sat bolt upright. A scream, sharp and frightened, almost caused his knees to buckle under him. A chubby-faced,

elderly woman, with gray hair streaming down her back and with a hand clutching a nightgown at her throat, was staring at him with blazing, terror-stricken eyes. A door near the bed swung open and Peachy, a comb and brush in her hand, was silhouetted in the stream of light from the bathroom.

"What's the matter, mother?" she asked quickly, for an instant as frightened as the woman on the bed.

She followed Mrs. Deane's pointing finger to the confused, blushing figure in the opposite doorway.

"I—er—was looking for a glass of water," stammered Eddie. "I thought this was the kitchen."

It did not require the girl's commanding wave of her arm to make him back out of the room with record haste and slam the unlucky door behind him. He stood, trembling, in the living room, wiping his damp forehead, wondering if the next move in the bedroom would be a call for the police and whether it would not be the better part of valor for him to snatch up his hat and flee at once.

CHAPTER X

When the bedroom door closed behind the agitated and scurrying Eddie, Peachy turned quickly toward her still frightened mother. The girl was not greatly worried. There was even a little smile of amusement playing around her lips. The sight of her dazed sailor boy friend gasping out his excuse and tumbling over himself to get away had been funny.

Peachy placed a soothing arm around the trembling Mrs. Deane and said, "Don't worry, mother. It's a friend of mine who walked home with me. He mistook this room for the kitchen, as he said."

"But—," the older woman started to protest, but Peachy was pushing her gently back under the covers and pressing a finger playfully over the disturbed sleeper's lips.

"Wait just a minute, mother, till I find out whether you've scared him to death," the girl promised. "Then I'll come back and tell you all about him."

She left her mother, who was still muttering, and went back to the living room. Eddie was standing over near the window, dismayed and uncertain.

"Gee," greeted Peachy, "you pretty near spilled the beans." Her smiling face reassured him that the disaster was not a major one.

"Can't a guy get thirsty?" he retorted. That was his story and he was going to stick to it. "Who's the lady in the bedroom?"

"My mother, of course."

He whistled and tilted his eyes toward the ceiling in an attitude of resignation. At the same time he reached for his hat, which he had tossed upon the divan. Her mother. Well, there'd be nothing doing then. With a nervous and easily awakened old lady just the other side of that thin door, even as facile a worker as Eddie Briggs could not hope to be at his best. His long pursuit of the red head and accompanying charms had led into a blind alley. He started to make an excuse to leave.

"Where are you going?" Peachy asked quickly.

"I got to be back on the ship at one o'clock and it's midnight now," he said. "I'm in bad with the skipper as it is. It's the brig for me this time if I'm late."

"It doesn't take an hour to get back," replied Peachy eagerly, too eagerly. "Stick around a while. I'll get you your drink."

Before he could stop her she had disappeared into the kitchen. She returned with a glass of water and handed it to him.

"I'll see if mother has gone back to sleep," she said and slipped into the bedroom, closing the door behind her.

Eddie stared after her. He had an impulse to get out while the getting was good. But her words, and especially her eyes, had seemed to promise him a re-

ward if he remained. She had so obviously fallen for him. She should be so easy. It might be worth while sticking. He became aware of the glass of water in his hand. Going over to the rubber plant near the window, he tilted the glass and spilled its contents into the plant. Then he set the glass on the oval topped table.

Meantime, Peachy in the bedroom was having a rather more difficult time with her mother than she had anticipated.

"Who was that young man?" Mrs. Deane sat up and demanded at once when her daughter returned. "Where did you get him?"

"He's a friend of mine whom I met at the dance hall," replied Peachy.

"You promised me when I let you take the job there that you would have nothing to do with the dance hall people out of business hours," said the older woman.

"I know. But this boy is different. He's a gentleman."

"He's a sailor. I saw his uniform."

"Sailors can be gentlemen, can't they?" Peachy defended warmly. "My father was both."

"Your father was a naval officer."

"Father enlisted as a sailor and rose from the ranks. He was very proud of that fact. I can remember him telling me about it many times."

Mrs. Deane was momentarily silenced. What Peachy said about her father was true. It was further

true that the girl's good looks, her vivacity, her self-assurance and her eagerness for the thrills of life had come from the late John Deane. Married life, or at least that part of it which the Navy had allowed them to live together, had been the one great adventure the grave and serious minded Mary Deane had ever enjoyed. Her husband had been a handsome, blustering, erratic and always cheerful individual who had given his life to save a shipmate from drowning in San Pedro harbor as blithely as he had done everything else in his career. The gray haired woman in the bed had a medal and a letter from the Secretary of the Navy and Peachy, left from her marriage.

Naturally there had been no money. John Deane had provided for his family as well as he could while he lived, but he had saved nothing. He was not the saving kind. Mrs. Deane had imposed instant opposition to Gladland from the start. Her daughter's increasing good looks and vivacity had been growing sources of concern with her mother. The girl's frank outlook on life, her familiarity with sex matters which young ladies of Mrs. Deane's generation had mentioned only with blushes, her smouldering rebellion over the boredom of her daily routine, worried the older woman. Now this dance hall problem had come up. A public dance hall to Mrs. Deane loomed up as a very wicked place, an entrance lobby to Avernus.

But such were the persuasive powers of Peachy and the effectiveness of her mixture of cajoling and threats that Mrs. Deane had been forced to yield. There was

one reservation: That the dance hall was to be a place of business exclusively; outside of business hours Peachy was to have nothing to do with it or its inmates. Since that was exactly the girl's own idea of the relationship of Gladland to herself, she agreed heartily.

During the year since Peachy had taken up her duties as hostess, Mrs. Deane had become gradually reconciled to the arrangement. The additional revenue had helped. They had moved into better quarters. Both had nicer clothes. There was never any trouble about the rent now. Physically the girl seemed to be standing the strain of selling ribbon all day and her personal charms half the night very well. And men and their wiles seemed to interest her merely as sources of income.

Peachy had quickly discovered that nickels at Gladland were not the only material returns which a good looking, wide awake girl could realize upon her charms. The discovery had been made partly through Ethel and partly through her own native enterprise. Ethel had been continually going to parties and coming back with new fur coats. Expensive looking men, with purring limousines waiting outside at the curb, had frequently appeared at the ribbon counter and, upon the pretense of buying something, talked in low tones with Ethel and made dates. With Ethel gone, Peachy now received these attentions.

Of all this Mrs. Deane saw only the extreme outward surface. She knew Peachy went out with men,

took presents from them and she didn't like it particularly. But, the girl explained, they were perfectly nice men. They were not the type that frequented Gladland. They insisted upon giving her presents out of the kindness of their hearts. They could easily afford it. She gave nothing in return. Mrs. Deane was lulled into a false confidence. Her daughter was bound to have men friends, she knew. As long as they were not public dance hall characters, they were probably all right.

Now had come this new complication. Peachy had brought home at nearly midnight a man whom, on her own admission, she had met at Gladland, and a sailor at that. Mrs. Deane was considerably worked up.

"You'll have to ask this sailor to go home at once," the mother ordered emphatically.

"He hasn't a home. He's from one of the ships in the fleet anchored in the harbor." Peachy leaned over, put her arms around her mother's neck, laid her red head on Mrs. Deane's bosom and said softly and ingratiatingly, "Oh, mother, have a heart. He's a nice boy. He's perfectly safe. I've only been with him a half hour or so and he has to leave very soon anyway. Let him stay a few minutes."

Mrs. Deane pursed her thin lips and shook her head in the negative.

"He did me a very good turn and almost got arrested for it," declared Peachy somewhat reluctantly. She was afraid an account of the battle between Eddie

and Al would only confirm her mother's low opinion as to dance hall environment. She decided to take the plunge. "Another man started to insult me and Eddie stopped him."

Mrs. Deane showed instant interest. Encouraged, Peachy related the whole incident, rose-tinting it to make Eddie a greater hero than he was and accompanying her account with vigorous gestures.

At the end Mrs. Deane admitted, "He acted like a gentleman. Maybe he is all right. Perhaps he really was looking for the kitchen."

"Can he stay then, mother?"

"For a few minutes."

Peachy fairly flew out of the room. She greeted Eddie smilingly. He looked his relief. He had begun to believe she had deserted him permanently. Without a word he took her arm and drew her down on the divan beside him.

"Where's your mother?" he asked anxiously.

"She's asleep," assured Peachy and hoped she was right.

She was very close to him now and supremely happy. She was quite completely under his spell. He had his hand under her chin and was lifting her face to his. Her arm was slipping around his broad shoulder.

The bedroom door creaked. They disengaged themselves and both scrambled rapidly to their feet. Mrs. Deane, a sombre gray kimono of heavy material swathing her from head to feet, walked into the living room.

Eddie, in the midst of his deep annoyance at the interruption, saw to his relief that there was at least a friendly look upon the invader's face.

"This is Mr. Briggs, mother," introduced Peachy at once. "Eddie, this is my mother."

She shook hands with him. He was blushing with confusion. The memory of his faux pas in the bedroom was too recent.

"How do you do, Mr. Briggs," Mrs. Deane said graciously. "My, you look an awful lot like my late husband. He was a warrant officer on the Kearsarge."

"I saw her once. She's a great old ship," said Eddie politely.

"Father enlisted as a sailor," maintained Peachy stoutly. She would not have her mother affecting any superior air with Eddie.

"I have his picture here in his sailor uniform," offered Mrs. Deane. "Would you like to see it?"

What else could Eddie answer?

She drew up the oval marble-topped table toward the divan and, seating herself between her daughter and her young man, opened the drawer of the table. There was nothing for Peachy and Eddie to do but re-seat themselves on either side of her. Eddie cast agonized looks in the girl's direction. She nodded brightly to him, indicating that it would be best to humor her mother for a while. She was secretly as much annoyed as was he.

Mrs. Deane fished upon a motley collection of photo-

graphs, new and old, in disarray in the table drawer. Finally she discovered the object of her search. She handed Eddie a somewhat yellowed picture of a tall, dark haired man in sailor uniform. He was striking a jaunty pose beside a photographer's property cannon. He was a handsome man, but for the life of him Eddie could see no resemblance to himself except in the uniform.

"He's a swell looking guy," approved Eddie. "Looks regular."

"He was a peach," corroborated Peachy.

So successful had been her exhibition of the likeness of the late Mr. Deane that the older woman started producing other pictures from the drawer.

"Here is Lucy when she was a year old," she showed brightly. Eddie resignedly inspected it. Peachy frowned. The snapshot showed a baby looking very much like all babies of that age. He guessed that Lucy must be Peachy's real name.

Followed photographs of the girl at progressive ages, shots of various residences occupied by the Deanes, snaps of picnics held across the Bay, relatives —all the miscellaneous collection of family camera lore characteristic of a woman who never threw anything of a personal nature away and which is interesting only to its owner.

Peachy was endeavoring to catch her mother's eye and indicate that Eddie was not greatly engrossed in this photographic parade of the past. Finally Mrs. Deane sensed her daughter's hints.

"This doesn't bore you, does it?" she asked Eddie pointedly.

He had to be polite at any cost, especially as the mother was looking at him rather sharply.

"It's awfully interesting," he lied.

Mrs. Deane cast a triumphant look at her daughter and went on with the show. Hours seemed to shuffle by. Eddie and Peachy suppressed yawns. It had been a day of hard work and excitement and it was now past midnight. Mrs. Deane droned on, producing picture after picture. But at last she too seemed to succumb to the drowsy atmosphere and the lateness of the hour. So near to sleep were both the young people that they did not at first notice that her voice had stilled. Eddie looked up suddenly to find that the older woman had slumped back against the purple pillow on the couch and was quite asleep. He nudged the redhead, who, on the opposite side of Mrs. Deane, had her own eyes closed. But Eddie's action in passing his arm behind the mother to reach Peachy's elbow had disturbed the former. She blinked her eyes and came out of her doze.

"Oh, I must have fallen asleep," she admitted drowsily.

"You'd better go back to bed, mother. You're tired," suggested Peachy hopefully.

Eddie's eyes seconded this motion with all his heart.

"It's past all our bedtimes," returned Mrs. Deane. "You must say good night to Mr. Briggs."

The faces of the young people fell blankly.

"I will in a minute," promised the girl.

Her mother arose. The young couple got up hopefully with her. The older woman's eyes peered searchingly at them. She shook hands with Eddie.

"Good night, Mr. Briggs. Come and see us again—at some earlier hour."

He nodded. The door closed behind the kimono-clad figure.

With a sigh of relief Eddie sank down upon the divan and drew the warm body of the girl after him. He took her in his arms, but she gently pushed herself away from him.

"Let's go somewhere where we'll be sure to be alone," she suggested softly.

He was annoyed. He thought it was a stall. How long did she think she could keep him waiting? He looked up at the grandfather's clock in the corner. It was twenty minutes of one.

"Gee, kid, I got to be on my way back to the ship," he declared with agitation, half fake and half real. "I got to report back on board at one."

She looked frankly her disappointment. They had risen again. She came very close to him. Her rich lips pouted. Her eyes were pleading.

"Wait till you see what I'm going to show you first," she offered. "Then you can go if you want to."

"I'm in bad with the skipper already," he half apologized. "If I overstay my leave, it's the brig for mine

and probably no more liberty in this town at all."

He was making her just a little angry. If he was so darned anxious to go, let him.

"All right. You know best. Go ahead if you like," she said a little tartly. She swung away from him with a shrug of her pretty half-bare shoulders.

He looked at her hungrily. Somehow she always appealed to him most when she was agitated and fire showed in her blue eyes.

"I'll stay," he decided suddenly. "Gee, I'll stay anywhere for you. Any time. I'll take a chance on getting aboard on time. Lead the way to where you're going to take me."

She tossed her head happily. She took his hand and guided him out of the room, down the dark hall and to a door at the rear of the passageway. She opened it cautiously so as not to disturb her sleeping mother.

A Paradise loomed out there in the night before their eyes.

CHAPTER XI

PARADISE was a colorful imitation Spanish patio mounted high on one of San Francisco's hills. Below it the sprawling city slept, with here and there a light blinking as if some restless sleeper were opening and closing a drowsy eye. Only Market Street, knifing a diagonal path of light from the Twin Peaks to the Bay, seemed fully awake.

The fog had blown back over the peaks and disappeared. The night was clear. Moonlight bathed the sky.

Beyond the bright ribbon that was Market Street the thickly populated Bay showed clearly. It was dotted with the riding lights of the Fleet and here and there with small but brightly illuminated ferry boats bringing back late Saturday night sojourners from Oakland and Sausilito and other points on the main land.

From the bridges of some of the men o' war, tiny points of light winked on and off. Quartermasters and signal boys standing the monotonous midnight anchor watch were amusing themselves by holding private conversations on the blinker with friends on other vessels. Eddie, had his mind not been on some-

thing else, might have interpreted these messages for Peachy. Many of them would have made snappy reading.

Small clusters of lights spotted Goat and Alcatraz Islands looming otherwise darkly in the Bay.

Faint whistles sounded up from the water. From the land came the occasional clank of a trolley car or the toot of an automobile. Otherwise silence.

It was a dark, soft, fairy-like panorama seeming almost unreal in the moonlight.

You walked from a drab cheap apartment into this sudden, almost heart-wrenching Paradise.

Paradise had been constructed by the clever brain and fingers of a red headed girl and the sympathy of an indulgent landlord not insensible to the appeal of deep blue eyes. He had permitted Peachy to do as she chose with the roof of the apartment below, which jutted out conveniently from the rear wall line of the house. There was already a railing around the roof, for safety's sake, and a door leading out upon it from the hall so that tenants could reach the fire escape in case of emergency. With this as a setting, Peachy had taken the fourteen by eighteen foot space and transformed it into a miniature Spanish patio.

Vases filled with bright colored flowers occupied little stands in the corner. A Spanish shawl was draped on the back wall. A wicker couch and two chairs to match, all with attractive blue and yellow upholstered seats, comprised the furniture. Two

wrought iron reading lamps in keeping with the Spanish character of the place furnished soft light. In the center of the comfortable little scene was a pedestal with a statuette of Psyche and Cupid in an embrace. This last had been a gift of an admirer of Peachy's. It was a beautiful little piece of work and she cherished it quite highly.

Here was the romantic spot where Peachy, tired from a stuffy day at her department store toil, was accustomed to come and rest for a while before she ate her dinner and dressed for the dance hall. Here her mother and herself spent most of their Saturday afternoons and Sundays and holidays and every other spare moment they could eke from lives that were pretty constantly at work. It was Peachy's pride, her dream spot, her touch of romance.

Naturally it was where she now brought Eddie.

They arrived on tiptoe so as to make sure not to disturb the sleeping Mrs. Deane. Peachy opened the door of Paradise rather proudly and watched his face. The result was a little disappointing. Eddie, truth to tell, was impatient. She was in his blood; he longed to put his hands on her and, until he had satisfied that rather dark impulse that had been seething within him for an hour or more, he would have neither eye nor brain for anything else.

She walked out to the railing of the patio, breathed deeply and looked out into the shadowy miles of fairyland below them. He joined her there. She stretched

out her arms lazily, happy in the joy of living and loving and being right where she was at that moment. She sighed drowsily.

"Isn't it all beautiful—beautiful?" she sighed to no one in particular. She seemed to have forgotten the fact that he was there. She remembered him when his arms eagerly stole around her waist. She looked into his face questioningly.

"It's a swell view," he said.

The words seemed to come from him with an effort. His face was flushed. He drew her more closely to him and she responded, hardly aware of her action. She was so soft and sweet and enticing, quite innocently enticing now. All coquetry seemed to have long since been discarded by her. He was the one man for a year or more who was seeing the real Peachy. The fact that he was unappreciative, that he was merely concerned with what other men also had wanted, while she believed him as suddenly and completely in love with her as she was with him—therein lurked the tragedy of the scene.

As soon as he thought he dared, he gently drew her toward the wicker couch in the background. She obeyed, leaning her fragrant body against him. They sank into the cushions.

"You can see the fleet out there—look," she pointed. "Which is your ship, Eddie?"

The blood was coursing hotly through him. He moistened his lips and swallowed before replying

huskily. "Over there, I guess—gee, I don't know. It's too dark. Don't let's talk about that."

She was contented to follow his suggestion. She snuggled down close to him, resting her head against his chest.

"Do you like me very much, Eddie?" she asked softly.

"Sure—you bet," he answered and held her more tightly.

Her half-closed eyes wandered lazily. They met the statuette of Psyche and Cupid, lovers of mythology, perfect lovers, the spirit of youth and beauty caught in a graceful embrace.

She drew Eddie's attention to them. "I think that is the most beautiful expression of love I ever saw."

He reluctantly followed her eyes. The statuette meant nothing to him. But he grew more confident with her words. She had had him worried. She seemed to be dreaming and talking of things in another world, to have forgotten that Eddie Briggs, sheik of the Pacific Fleet, was even present. Her mind had been apparently concentrated on such non-essential things as beauty, lights, moonlight. Now she had spoken of love. That was right down his alley. That's what they were out there, alone, for, wasn't it? His self-assurance returned. He knew how to work now.

"You don't call that loving, do you, kid?" he asked jauntily and grinned down at her.

She looked up at him, surprised. His words had jarred her. They were out of key. And the flushed, drawn, almost panting look about his face. She had seen that expression on men's faces before. It presaged trouble. She was a little frightened. But then, she concluded, he had been joking. Moreover, you couldn't expect a sailor to talk like Cupid. She was sure she could not herself make the responses of a Psyche if he did.

She loved him. Close to him thus, his arms pressing her tightly, she was completely his. She was not of a repressed nature, after all, she had discovered. She was trembling a little. Half with him, half with the soft romance of their setting.

"I'll show you how real loving should be done," he said thickly, in a voice so crudely suggestive that if she had more than half heard him she might have been shocked out of the romance-inspired half-swoon into which she had fallen.

But she only smiled. And she slowly raised her lips to his as if drawn by a magnet. Her whole body cried out to be kissed and caressed.

It was what he had been waiting for. His lips quivering, his body rocked with an unholy passion, he crushed her fiercely to him. His lips met hers so violently that she involuntarily gasped with pain, a pain that was half ecstasy.

He did not stop there. Carried away, he became bold and adventuresome. Something inside him, some-

thing small but insistent, was warning him, tugging at him. Insisting to him that here was no ordinary girl, to paw and maul. Even as he became more brazen, there was little kick in it for him. It was something more than just her soft, beautiful body that he wanted, something not physical at all!

The battle within him had no chance to fight itself out. For now she had become aware that romance had fled, that something dark and ominous had usurped its place. Her eyes widened. She snapped out of her mood swiftly and decisively. She wrenched her lips away from his. She seized his wrists like a fury and hurled them from her. She tore herself away from him. She stared at him, hurt, insulted, angry. Her face became hard. She had run into this ugly situation before and she knew how to handle it.

"How do you get that way?" she said coldly, all expression gone from her voice.

He was flustered, non-plussed. He tried to carry it off.

"What are you trying to do—kid me?" he asked.

Almost mechanically he reached out to take her into his arms again. Conscience was roaring at him now to desist. Something stronger even than conscience, something not unakin to love, was warning him not to smash this precious thing that, previous to his unpardonable actions, had arisen between them. But he had always treated girls this way and previously it had always worked.

She sprang to her feet away from him. A sneer of contempt was struggling to her lips. She tried to be hard and nonchalant.

"Run along, big boy," she said with an effort. "You got me all wrong."

He fought with his embarrassment. Way down deep within him he was ashamed, frightened. A wry expression was on his face.

"Well—so long," he bowed mockingly. "Just another evening wasted away as far as I am concerned."

He flipped his right hand up to his head in a derisive salute. He turned on his heel and disappeared through the door into the hallway. When he had left her, her body slumped. She very much wanted to cry. Her lips trembled. Even yet she could not believe that this awful thing had happened, that this one true love of her life had been shattered. She turned and, without knowing what she did, followed him swiftly down the hall and into the living room, where he had gone in search of his hat. She called his name softly. She was hoping desperately that he would say something to her that would brand his actions a terrible mistake, that he would abjectly apologize so that eventually she could forgive him and take him back. She was fighting for her love, battling this terrible anger at him that, she told herself, was the proper way to feel.

"Eddie," she pleaded, "I can't believe this of you. I can't believe that you thought I—Eddie, tell me——"

He stood there stolidly. His inmost heart shrieked

at him to beg forgiveness, to cringe before her. But his pride was too strong. He shrugged his shoulders.

"What difference does it make?" he said coldly.

She seized his arm eagerly.

"Why did you save me from one insult when you intended to commit a bigger one yourself?" she asked.

Now all he wanted to do was to hurt her so that he could run away from her and her terribly pathetic face more quickly. He was a coward at the moment. He could not trust himself to look at her any longer. He feared breaking down. He must smash her cruelly.

"Don't get a swell head," he rasped. "I framed that fight with Al so that I could make a hit with you. And it worked fine."

She fell back from him, amazed, wounded to the quick. He turned abruptly and fairly ran from the room.

An uncontrollable rage flamed within her, a justifiable rage. All love for him was engulfed madly in her blazing anger. He was rushing down the stairs.

"Damn you, I'll—" she cried, a red-headed fury, and started after him. She wanted to get her hands on his throat, to tear him apart for his cruel, searing insult. She looked madly around for something to hurl at him. She snatched the cup they had won in the dancing contest. She rushed out into the patio, caught up the statuette of Cupid and Psyche and reached the head of the stairs.

Frightened now, he was struggling with the lock on the door down there. The damned thing would not

open. He cursed hotly to himself. He ducked just in time as the heavy statuette came hurtling through the air. It hit the wall just above his head and showered down upon him in a score of pieces. The cup was not so well aimed. It fell harmlessly at his feet. At the same time the door latch yielded. He flung the door open and rushed out into the moonlight, slamming the door after him.

The act of hurling the missiles and the slamming door brought Peachy a little to her senses. The muscles in her face were trembling and twitching. From sheer emotional exhaustion she moved back a few paces and leaned helplessly against the wall. For an instant her anger welled up again. She clenched her hands and hurled imprecations to the ceiling. It was like a dying man's last effort. Then all life, all strength went out of her. Her body was wracked by sobs.

Finally the paroxysm ceased. She raised her head, pushed back her damp hair. She turned mechanically and walked slowly into the living room, closing the door behind her. She slumped down upon the couch there and buried her burning face in her hands.

The world had come abruptly to an end.

CHAPTER XII

1

A WHITE-FACED Eddie Briggs reached the sidewalk. A changed Eddie. Between that stubborn door and the street, conscience and heart had won a tremendous victory. He stood still, adjusting his hat and blouse, unable to go further. A look of wonder was in his face.

He was deeply, miserably ashamed of himself. He had been guilty of a cowardly, contemptible action. He had killed the one beautiful thing that had ever come into his life. Suddenly he realized that what he had been attempting to get he had not wanted at all. It would have been so much wormwood and ashes. He had acted in the way he had always acted with women ever since the days of those thrill-thirsty, foolish, divorce-seeking women back in his father's hotel. Women had all seemed to expect him to act that way and he was young and intensely physical and he had gotten a kick out of it.

But this girl, she had been different from the start. He should have known. The very fact that she dominated his mind, even after she had eluded his pursuit

of her down Market Street, should have warned him. He had never put himself to so much trouble and worry for a girl before. There had always been another girl just around the corner. Kicked out of Gladland and lying out there on the grass of the little park, he had told himself that he would die if he did not see her again. It had been an effort to leave the park while she was still inside there in that brightly lighted dance hall. The natural thing for him to have done was to have shrugged his shoulders and gone with Al after fresh game.

What a fool!

He had been in love with her all the time! And he had never been so much in love with her as he was at that moment!

He wanted to go back to her and fall down on his knees and beg her to forgive him. Then he would kiss her and tell her he loved her. Once he got that over, she could do what she wanted with him. Once he had convinced her that he was not contemptible, that he wasn't all bad, she could send him away if she liked. He deserved it. It was too much to hope that she would really forgive him.

Dear red-headed Peachy. A pure, wonderful girl. And to think that he had won her and then thrown her away!

He looked up at the drab apartment house in front of him. A light was still burning on the third floor, in her living room. She was still up. He turned soberly and started for the front door. Suddenly the

light, as if a symbol, was snapped off. Darkness swathed the whole building. He slumped hopelessly and started walking slowly away.

II

Meantime, Peachy was crying softly on the couch. Finally, realizing that life after all must go on, she aroused herself, rose wearily to her feet. She walked toward the bedroom door and extinguished the light in the living room. Fumbling in the dark she switched on a small lamp on the table near her mother's bed. Slowly she started to unhook her dress.

Mrs. Deane was disturbed. Her eyes opened blinkingly and she dimly saw her daughter through the half-darkness.

"I like that sailor boy," she smiled. "He seemed very nice. But, my goodness, Lucy, it's terribly late. You must get to bed immediately."

A choked half-sob met her ear. She looked sharply at her daughter.

"Come over here," she commanded.

Peachy, direly in need of sympathy, flung herself down upon the bed, her head upon her mother's shoulder, sobbing as if her heart would break. Mrs. Deane patted her back consolingly, frightened, worried. The girl lifted a tear-stained face to her mother's.

"What's the matter?" Mrs. Deane asked.

Peachy only shook her head.

"You were right the first time about sailors, about

all men, mother," at length she faltered. "I'll never trust any man again."

"What do you mean?" her mother asked sharply.

"Oh, don't worry, nothing has happened," Peachy reassured her in a cold voice. "I fell in love with him, and he just didn't love me. That's all."

Mrs. Deane sighed with relief.

"Perhaps he'll realize his mistake quickly enough and come back," she soothed. "Men don't know their own minds and hearts."

It was inconceivable to her that anyone, offered her child's love, should spurn it. It pained her to see her daughter so obviously unhappy.

"I'll never let him come back," declared Peachy. "He's no good. He's like all the rest. I was a fool to think of him any different than I've ever thought of any man. I'll never make that mistake again."

"I hope not—but you will," said Mrs. Deane with an unexpected flash of wisdom.

III

Eddie Briggs was plodding slowly down Market Street. He had no idea of what time it was. The knowledge that he must somehow get back to his ship was moving his feet without orders from his brain. He turned right at the Ferry Building, covered a block or two and swerved to the left. A wharf and the oily, glistening waters of the Bay were directly ahead of him. A sailor with a pistol protruding from a khaki belt around his waist and a blue band with the

A Paramount Picture — *The Fleet's In*

EDDIE LOSES HIS HEAD—AND ALMOST HIS GIRL.

white block letters "S. P." sewed to it stepped in front of him.

"Let's see your pass, buddy," demanded that individual sharply.

Eddie, startled, stopped and looked up at him. He mechanically drew a crumpled piece of paper from his blouse pocket. The shore patrol man read it. He whistled.

"Your pass was up at one o'clock and it's half past two now," he commented. "You'll sure get hell. You're lucky there's a boat left."

Eddie nodded, not interested, and walked out to the end of the wharf. A launch, engine running and containing three or four other gobs and a coxswain and an engine man, rocked in the swell. He stepped down into it and slumped into a seat near the stern.

"Cripes, Eddie, where have you been?" a voice sang out. It was Al. Pickings had been poor. He was, miracle of miracles, returning early to the ship.

"None of your damned business," returned Eddie insultingly. Damn Al, why didn't he let him alone?

"Gee, wherever you was, it sure gave you a swell disposition." Then with a flash of intuition, "Did the red head throw you down?"

Eddie turned on him, "Shut your face about her!" He cried out so violently that Al, frightened, drew away from him.

"Wait until old Double Duty Duffy gets a crack at you. You're late as hell." Al flung back to him in malicious triumph.

The motor sputtered. The lines were flung into the boat. They eased away from the dock and shot out into the Bay. The other gobs were talking exultingly of their exploits ashore, gilding them, promising themselves renewals of pleasure when they received their next leave. Eddie was glum and silent. The launch discharged passengers at two other ships. It finally slid along the companionway of the California, looming gigantically in the darkness.

A squat, bulldog-like figure stood beside the officer of the deck at the head of the gangway. It was Double Duty Duffy.

"Cripes, there's your boy friend," whispered Al, sliding over toward Eddie, sympathetic because of what was about to happen to his chum. "Tell him you got sick ashore or something. Limp like hell. Tell him your old man got took with something and you had to stay and take care of him. Tell him something."

"I'll tell him nothing. What do I care what happens to me?"

He climbed out of the boat after Al. He stumbled up the gangway.

"You're early," he heard the officer of the deck, a smartly clad lieutenant looking as if he had just stepped out of his bath, say to Al.

The officer held out his hand for Eddie's pass and he turned it over.

"Briggs was supposed to be back here at one o'clock," Boatswain Duffy cut in menacingly.

"What detained you?" asked the officer. He liked Eddie. He was willing to give him a chance.

"Nothing," snapped Eddie. "I'm just late."

The officer was nettled by the lad's surly manner.

"Take him to the brig, Duffy," he ordered. "We'll attend to him in the morning."

Duffy stepped up and seized Eddie's arm with strong, firm fingers. He marched him along the deck.

"You spilled the beans that time, my bucko," crooned Duffy. "You'll go down for a big shoot this time."

Eddie made no retort. Duffy was amazed. The glibbest-tongued gob on the ship, the one sailor who had always stood up to him and given more than he got, was silent.

They walked down a passageway, descended a ladder into the bowels of the ship. They stopped in front of a little steel door and the boatswain's mate opened it with a key. He thrust his charge inside, almost sending him sprawling. The room, practically a cell, air coming from a single small porthole, was in total darkness.

There was a wooden hammock netting in one corner. Eddie walked over to it, sank down upon its hard surface. Then, without removing his clothes or rummaging a hammock out of the netting and swinging it for a bed, he lay down on the wood and tried to go to sleep.

He couldn't.

CHAPTER XIII

A GRIM group in Navy blue consisting of two officers, Chief Boatswain's Mate James Joseph "Double Duty" Duffy and three sailors was assembled in the hot morning California sunshine in front of the main mast of the U.S.S. California. One of the officers was especially heavy laden with gold braid on his sleeves, a hard faced, gray haired man past middle age. He was the skipper, and one look at the scowling expression upon his wind-burnt visage as he strode up to the mast had caused the three gobs' countenances to fall. The old man was in a bad mood. His liver was probably troubling him again. Beside him stood Lieutenant Girard, officer of the deck.

The yeoman silently handed a paper to Girard, who turned it over to the captain without a word.

"Tremaine!" growled the commanding officer.

A tall, freckled faced sailor, obviously ill at ease, stepped forward and saluted.

"Tremaine," said the skipper sternly, "you are reported to have crawled into one of the life boats and gone to sleep when you should have been forward with a working party. Have you anything to say?"

"No, sir."

"Fined four days and liberty cancelled as long as we are in this port. Next!"

The record was passed back to the yeoman, who made notations upon it. A second paper was handed the skipper.

"Bush!"

A sailor with the red circlet of the engineering division upon his left shoulder faced the captain.

"Bush, you smoked while on duty in the engine room. Is that correct?"

"Well, I——"

"Yes or no?"

"Yes."

"Cancel all liberty for Bush while in this port. Next!"

The same procedure was followed, and the third defendant faced the deck court martial.

"Briggs, you over-stayed your liberty last night and reported late aboard. Is that right?"

"Yes, sir," replied Eddie in so low and humble a voice that the old man stared sharply at him through sea-wrinkled eye-lids. Briggs had been before him on other occasions and had always had glib, jaunty excuses and a self-assurance under fire that had made it a pleasure to discipline him. To find him now so depressed and contrite was a disappointment.

"Nothing to say for yourself, Briggs," encouraged the captain.

"No, sir."

"Hard labor for three days, in addition to your

regular duty, and all shore liberty cancelled for the balance of our stay here. Duffy, you take charge of Briggs and see that he is kept busy."

Double Duty grinned maliciously as he saluted.

Lieutenant Girard was conversing earnestly with the captain in an undertone. The latter listened stolidly. His lips were pursed in deliberation. Finally he called to the retreating Eddie and his chaperon, Duffy, "Just a moment, Briggs!"

They returned.

"Lieutenant Girard tells me your family is in town and would like to see you before we sail. In consideration of them, and for that reason only, you may go ashore for an hour Tuesday night between ten and eleven. That's the night before we sail."

Eddie brightened a little and flushed as he looked gratefully toward Lieutenant Girard. He had been guilty of lying to the lieutenant about his father coming to visit him and on that basis had secured his previous liberty in San Francisco. The lieutenant had remembered and interceded for him again.

"Thank you, sir," said Eddie and saluted again. Double Duty Duffy was not at all pleased. It was disgusting the way this fresh, good for nothing gob was coddled by the officers, even by the old man himself.

"You got away with murder as usual," growled Duffy as he led Eddie aft. Then with an anticipatory grin, "But we'll try and give you a pleasant three day workout, *Mister* Briggs. Instead of loafing around

in your dress blues and waving your little flags in the semyphore tower, you're goin' to find out how the real guys work in this man's Navy."

Eddie did not answer. Duffy peered at him anxiously. If this bucko wasn't going to fight back, there would be less fun in riding him than he had thought.

"What's the matter with you, Briggs? You got the pip or something?" demanded Duffy.

Eddie turned on him with a flash of his old insolence.

"Listen, tough guy," snapped Eddie. "You got me where you want me for a while. I'll do any dirty job you hand me, and like it. But my health is my own damned business. And if you want to keep yours, you better remember that."

Double Duty bristled and swore a little. He threatened to report his charge at once for insubordination. But he didn't. Duffy was just a little afraid of Eddie's educated fists and tongue at that.

"Take off those trick clothes and jump into your dungarees pronto," roared Duffy. "Report to me on the deck in five minutes."

Eddie obeyed.

During the next three days Chief Boatswain's Mate James Joseph Duffy lived in Paradise and First Class Signalman Edward Briggs dwelt in a modified edition of Mr. Dante's well known Inferno.

Eddie did everything but sleep in his dungarees, the Navy's working overalls.

He crept on his hands and knees behind a sloppy pail of soapy water and holy-stoned and scrubbed decks until he thought his back would split in two. When he finished a shift, he was soaking wet from head to foot and he could hardly stand erect.

He polished miles and miles of brass, from the engine room to the flying bridge. His hands were raw and the polish was imbedded so deeply in his finger nails that, always fastidious about his appearance, he feared that he could never dig it all out.

He spent long, sweaty hours in the blazing, fly-ridden blast furnace that was the California's galley. He peeled tons of potatoes under the harsh and exacting orders of Ole Lundgren, the huge Swedish chief cook. He washed and dried dishes until he lost all appetite for food of any kind.

He hung, suspended by a scaffold, in the fiery sun over the side of the giant vessel and wielded a paint brush for eight hours at a stretch. He smeared red lead over the decks to the irritating barks of Double Duty, who was never off his neck for a moment.

He was grimly determined that Duffy should not be able to find legitimate fault with him, that the tyrannical boatswain's mate should unearth nothing to tell the officer of the deck that might prolong Eddie's servitude.

Four hours out of twelve Eddie was permitted to change into his blue uniform and ascend to the semaphore tower for his regular tour of duty as a signalman. These hours came as a welcome relief. Eddie

had not labored as a member of a regular deck working party for years. Almost immediately upon his assignment to the ship his above-average intelligence had won him a post as helmsman and a station on the bridge with the squad of lucky lads who worked with their heads rather than their bodies. His elevation to signalman had seemed to assure him permanent respite from deck-scrubbing and painting parties. His hands and body were not suited to an abrupt plunge into tough manual labor. He suffered keenly in both body and mind.

The ordinary gob, condemned to a life of back-breaking toil from sun-up to sun-down, is frankly envious and scornful of the "lucky stiffs" assigned to the lighter duties of bridge and signal tower. Eddie, in the past, had done his share of rough kidding of his less fortunate shipmates. Now it was their turn to get even. They guyed him unmercifully. Scrubbing next to him on the deck, they wise cracked continually.

"Don't bear down, Eddie. You'll spoil them lily white hands of yours."

"I guess the only thing you ever painted before is your eyebrows, hey?"

"My goodness, look who's here. Who told you to put on your dungarees?"

They stole his holy-stone and brush. They spilled his paint pots. They stood in front of the galley door and criticized the way he was cutting up spuds. They enjoyed his three days of penitence almost as much as did Double Duty Duffy.

Eddie took it all good-naturedly. He spoiled their fun by not even hearing most of their wise cracks. He had other things on his mind, and he was generally too tired to think of a snappy come-back anyway.

At the end of the day after he had bathed and changed back into his blues and chow was over for the night, he leaned wearily and enviously at the rail smoking a cigarette as the chattering, joyful liberty parties shoved off, and silently berated a cruel fate that had kept him a toiling prisoner. His mind was full of Peachy. He was so much in love with her that it actually hurt him physically down inside. He had cursed himself so many times for the way he had treated her that it had become a monotonous routine. He lived only for that hour ashore the night before they sailed so that he could apologize abjectly to her and hope against hope that she would forgive him. It was too much to believe that she would return his love now. All he asked was to see her and talk to her again. To set himself straight with her, at least.

He lay tossing in his hammock nights, half with despair over his lost love, half because he was simply too exhausted to sleep.

Now the last day of his sentence had arrived. That night would come his chance to see her. Suppose she was not at Gladland when he feverishly sought her there? His heart sank. It was so short a time in which to accomplish much. It would take him twenty-five minutes to get there and another twenty-five to

get back. Ten minutes in which to do the most important thing in his life!

As he finished his final round of deck duty that afternoon and was about to go to his quarters and shift into his blues preliminary to standing his four-o'clock-to-eight watch in the semaphore tower, Double Duty Duffy confronted him with a sneer. Double Duty was sour. He was like a cat from whom a particularly desirable mouse is about to escape.

"Well, smart guy, your little pleasure trip with me is done," said Double Duty. "I hope you have enjoyed it as much as I have. I guess you've learned your little lesson and know now that you don't own this tub."

"I haven't kicked," replied Eddie, anxious to get away from him.

"Let me give you a tip," said Duffy in his most unpleasant voice. "The next time you fall for a hard boiled mama, remember you've got a home and——"

He stopped abrupty and fell back as Eddie, eyes blazing, advanced upon him with clenched fists. A smashing right to Duffy's jaw would at that moment have soothed all of Eddie's physical aches and pains. But there was Peachy to think of. An assault on the boatswain's mate would send his precious shore leave glimmering. Eddie's fists dropped. He stepped back. Duffy, frankly frightened, recalled his courage.

"Be careful, young feller," he said, but not very authoritatively. "Snap out of those dungarees and beat it up to the semyphore tower for your watch."

Eddie shot him a glance of withering contempt.

"I got a perfect right to sock you, Duffy," he spat out between clenched teeth. "You insulted a girl and me. The skipper won't stand for that. If I were the same kind of sniveling, four flushing, snooping tattle-tale as you, I'd go right up now and report you." Duffy whitened a little. "But I'm not that kind of a guy. The next personal crack you make about me, I'll get permission to fight it out with you and I'll knock your ugly head loose from your body."

Before the astonished Duffy could think up a suitable retort, Eddie had turned on his heels and strode belligerently away. His outburst had done him a world of good for the moment.

CHAPTER XIV

Eddie Briggs, having shifted from greasy dungarees to blues, hoisted himself listlessly over the railing of the California's high semaphore tower. His signal flags were under his arm. Hank Walsh, the grinning signalman whom Eddie was relieving, greeted him.

"Gee, I bet old Double Duty hated to let you go, hey?" said Hank.

"Yeh," said Eddie. He was in no mood for chewing the rag.

Hank, one leg swung over the railing for the trip down the ladder, commented, "Sore, are you, kid?"

"Well, I'm not exactly going around kissing people," confirmed Eddie. He unfurled his flags for action and glanced at the messages pinned to the signal board in front of him. Hank, with a final mutter about his shipmate's crabbiness, swung agilely down to the deck.

Eddie leaned morosely against the signal mast and scanned the busy Bay lying sparkling below him. Well, nothing to do now but kill time until eight o'clock in the tower. Then chow and another irritating wait until ten. And, in the end, he probably wouldn't see Peachy anyway.

What mattered it then to Eddie that he was at that moment occupying a choice seat from which to view a panorama of surpassing beauty? Mighty fighting ships of the line swinging lazily at anchor formation for a mile or more on the placid waters of the Bay. Launches bearing gold-braided officers and blue-clad men and here and there a piquant feminine figure in white. Pert little captain's yawls, all sorts of small boats, racing between the fleet and the shore. Ferry boats plying a busy trade between San Francisco and the cities of the mainland. To the port side the crowded towers of the western metropolis and, beyond, the sun-shadowed twin peaks. Gulls swooping down to within a few feet of Eddie's head. A cool breeze mitigating the effect of the hot California sun.

And, amid it all, a husky, good looking, sun-browned sailor boy looking as if his best friend had just passed away.

Eddie, in pursuance of his duty, swept the fleet languidly with his eyes for possible signals. He picked up his binoculars and covered the outlying vessels. As he lowered the glasses, he became aware of waving signal flags from the tower of the U.S.S. Washington. He watched and recognized his own ship's call letters. He could see the Washington tower quite clearly. The ship was only about two hundred yards away. He recognized the squat, broad-shouldered figure that was manipulating the Washington's signal flags. It was Searchlight Doyle. Eddie's teeth clenched grimly. Ten to one his rival had

seen him ascend to the California's tower and was sending him a personal message. Such a procedure was against the regulations, but Searchlight was never one to consider that very carefully.

Sure enough. "Tough—luck—you—have—to—stay — aboard — ship — while — I — make — all — the — sweet — mamas — in — port," came the taunting message via Searchlight's signal flags.

Eddie was annoyed. He was in no mood to be kidded. He started waving his own flags with the speed and grace born of long experience.

"Be — prepared — to — eat — my — dust — when — I — get — ashore — at — ten — o'clock," went hurtling over the Bay.

Eddie saw his rival turn and, lowering himself over the side of the Washington's tower, slide rapidly down the rope ladder toward the deck. Evidently Searchlight's signal watch was finished. He was probably going to wash and dress and dash ashore. The lucky stiff, thought Eddie.

The latter resumed his listless leaning pose against the signal mast. His mind was on Peachy. Would this bozo Doyle try and renew his efforts to win her when he got ashore? Probably. And he might have luck too. That was the worst of it. Peachy, angered at Eddie, might take her revenge by becoming friendly with his foe. Eddie clenched his hands and swore under his breath.

He reached into his blouse and drew out the snapshot, now slightly crumpled, that Peachy and he had

posed for so gayly the night in the photograph gallery. He studied it gravely and then, on an impulse, pulled a couple of thumb tacks from the signal board in front of him and fastened down the picture on the board. Somehow it eased his torment if he could conveniently look at her whenever he liked, even if he could see her only in a picture.

He had barely time to cover the photograph quickly with one of his flags when the impertinent little pug nose and freckled face of Red Burke, the skipper's orderly, slid up over the railing of the signal tower. Eddie heartily disliked the small, self-important Burke. So did practically everyone else on the ship. Red had secured the soft job of captain's messenger through devious strategy of which the rest of the ship's company did not approve. He used his advantageous position close to the commanding officer to glean for himself the best of chow and hours and as little work as possible. He rode his shipmates upon the slightest provocation. Red was what is known on naval ships as a "so-and-so politician."

Burke held a paper in his hand as he hoisted himself into the tower beside Eddie.

"Message for the Nebraska and make it snappy, Briggs," he ordered with irritating pomp.

"Keep your shirt on," retorted Eddie and fairly snatched the message out of Burke's hands.

"Pretty soft for you being up here instead of sweating down in the brig," sneered Burke. "I heard Duffy

telling Girard, the officer of the deck, that you got away with murder. I think you did too."

"Too bad you and Duffy aren't running this battle wagon," returned Eddie sarcastically. "I'll speak to the old man and see if he can't arrange it. Meantime, you'll oblige me by getting the hell out of here."

"You'd better hold your gab, Briggs, or——"

"Get out or I'll throw you out!" roared Eddie, making a menacing move toward the orderly. He was feeling so touchy at the moment that he probably would have taken a crack at the irritating Burke if the latter had not scrambled over the railing so rapidly that he nearly lost his balance and was in danger of being hurled to the deck below.

When his annoyer had thus precipitously departed, Eddie read the message for the Nebraska and tacked it to the signal board. He lifted his flags. He gazed at the photograph of himself and Peachy, stuck alongside the lately received message, and sighed. He wigwagged the Nebraska's call letter. After two or three minutes there was an answering signal from the Nebraska.

Eddie, his eyes alternately shifting from the message to Peachy, started waving his flags.

The sending of the message completed, Eddie lowered his flags and was about to resume his resting posture against the signal mast. To his annoyance, there came an energetic request from the Nebraska's tower for a repetition of the message.

"The saps!" growled Eddie, annoyed that they would not let him moon over his lost love's picture in peace.

His mind again divided between the message and Peachy, reclining side by side on the board in front of him, he mechanically sent the message again.

To his amazement and further irritation, there was a second request from the other vessel for him to repeat his message. What was the matter with them? Doggone it, he was the best signalman in the fleet. Hadn't he recently won a prize for speed and accuracy in sending semaphore messages? Never before had anybody asked him for a repeat.

He stood erect and sent the message faster than ever. This time they apparently got it straight. Eddie snorted. Must be a green signalman up there. Didn't know enough to acknowledge the message. Eddie, fed up with the world in general, leaned with his elbows on the signal board and made a careful study of the piquant face of Peachy Deane. Gee when was he going to see her again, if ever? He was awakened three minutes later by a hand laid on his shoulder. He turned resignedly around to face Lieutenant Girard, officer of the deck.

Girard, unknown to Eddie, had been looking over the sailor's shoulder at the object which so engrossed the signalman's attention. As he spotted the photograph, a gleam of understanding flashed into the officer's face and the expression of anger which had clouded his features when he scrambled over the rail softened a little. He was puzzled. Had hard-boiled

Briggs, the gob whom he had frequently overheard boasting to his shipmates that he never fell for girls but that they inevitably fell for him, succumbed at last? Amusement tempered Girard's anger and puzzlement. Nevertheless, he faced Eddie sternly as the latter saluted. At the same time Eddie craftily dropped one of his flags over the picture, hoping to hide it.

"Briggs," snapped Girard, "will you kindly tell me what code you used when you sent this crazy message three times to the Nebraska?"

He handed a piece of paper to Eddie. It read:

"Nebraska take position number four changing position with Peachy forgive me I didn't realize you were that kind of a girl. Comply with these instructions immediately. Must see you when I get ashore."

Eddie's lower jaw gaped. He was white and nearly speechless. He tried to bluff it out.

"I never sent that, sir," he stammered.

"Evidently you did. The officer of the deck of the Nebraska radioed it over and said nobody there could make head nor tail of it. I don't blame them."

"I'm terribly sorry, sir," admitted Eddie. "I'll send the right message at once."

Trembling so that he could hardly handle the flags, he sent the Nebraska's call letters again. Receiving an acknowledgement, he snapped out the California's orders correctly and with precision. He lowered his flags. Promptly a confirmation was waved by the other vessel.

Cautiously Eddie looked around. To his chagrin,

Lieutenant Girard was still there. Worse, the officer had unfastened Peachy's picture from the signal board and had it in his hands inspecting it. Gee, now he was in for it! Balling up a signal and using a board for a photograph gallery besides. Negligence of duty and all that sort of thing. It was the brig for him.

To his surprise, Girard seemed to be in a sympathetic mood. The officer had always liked Briggs. There was good stuff in the boy. His intelligence, his wit and ready tongue had long since won Girard's fancy. Now Briggs seemed to be so genuinely sorry and wrought up. There was something more to this than met the eye. Girard proposed to find out what it was.

"What's the matter with you, Briggs?" the officer asked. "I never knew you to make a mistake in a signal before."

Briggs hung his head and did not attempt a reply.

"Is *this* the trouble?" Girard pursued gently, indicating the photograph in his hand.

Eddie hesitated. Then he said softly, "I'm afraid it is."

At that moment he felt the tremendous urge, the dire necessity of confiding his predicament to somebody. He did not hope for any favor from Lieutenant Girard. It was just that the officer was the only person in the past three days who had looked upon Sailor Briggs' hard luck with a kindly, rather than a scoffing, derisive air.

"She's a fine looking girl," commented Girard.

"Isn't she the one you were dancing with when you won the contest at Gladland the other night? The contest that Lieutenant Smith and I judged?"

Eddie nodded.

"What's the matter? In love?" asked Girard gently.

"I guess I am, sir," almost whispered Eddie. "You see, I thought she was a hot number like all the rest of them. Out for a good time and nothing else. When I found out I was all wrong, it was too late. She was off me a mile for getting fresh with her. As soon as I left her, I knew I was really nuts about her. I'm not going to get the chance to apologize and try to make up with her. That's what gets my goat. It's made me a little goofy, I guess."

Girard was touched. That a girl should have rendered the gay, wise-cracking Eddie Briggs a glum, shattered gloom was almost unbelievable. But Girard understood. He had been in love himself. In a way it was the best thing in the world that could have happened to Briggs. It had knocked his conceit into a cocked hat. He would be a better man for it. That is, if it did not completely break his spirit. Girard thought too much of the boy to allow this to happen.

"You're going ashore at ten o'clock, aren't you, Briggs?" he asked. "You can see her then and make it up with her."

"Gee, I'll only have an hour," Eddie protested. "I got to be back aboard at eleven. I'll be lucky to get five minutes alone with her. I don't dare be late to the ship this time."

Girard regarded him thoughtfully. Should he give the lad one more chance? He decided it might be worth while.

"If I give you a pass to leave the ship when your watch is up at eight o'clock," he said to Eddie's astonished and delighted ears, "will you be very sure to be back by midnight? That will help you, won't it?"

"It will save my life," cried Eddie with conviction. "Gee, sir, I don't know how to thank you enough. You sure treat me a lot better than I deserve."

Girard drew a piece of paper out of his pocket and scribbled on it. He handed it to Eddie, who thrust it eagerly into his blouse pocket.

"Remember—back at midnight, no matter what happens," warned the lieutenant as he climbed over the railing.

"I'll be back even if I break both legs," promised Eddie.

Alone again, Eddie was beside himself with joy. His depression had been dissipated into thin air. Girard was a prince. Life became suddenly worth living again. Briggs was all smiles. He did a little dance of joy around the signal tower. He snatched up the picture of Peachy from the signal board, where the lieutenant had laid it, and regarded her fondly.

"I'm going to see you soon, kid," he told her. "Then I'll show you I'm not the skunk you think I am."

A thought struck him that he must somehow let Peachy know he was coming, that he must prepare her in advance for his apology and his declaration of

love. The task ahead of him was not an easy one. He must break the ice of her reserve with a message in advance. Whom could he get to take it ashore to her for him? None of those bozos who had been razzing him would do. He would never ask a favor of them. Well, there was Al. Al would be sympathetic and Al knew Peachy. Also, he recalled that his chum had said he was going ashore at five o'clock when the ship's work was done for the day. The liberty party should be falling in on the deck now.

Eddie went eagerly to the after part of the signal tower and looked down. Sure enough, sailors were assembling below. The launch was riding the waves at the foot of the outside companionway. He recognized the broad, good-natured face and slouchy body of Al Pearce, all dolled up in his shore-going dress blues. Eddie leaned over the railing and shouted down to his friend. He whistled their private call. He was rewarded finally by seeing the tall sailor turn and squint up at him. Eddie made frantic motions for Al to climb up into the tower. Al looked around. Neither Double Duty Duffy nor an officer was in sight. He would risk invading the signal tower, where only those with business there were supposed to go. He started climbing the ladder.

Eddie turned to the signal board. He tore a blank page out of the back of the signal record book and wrote rapidly. His note read:

"Dear Peachy: I've been wanting for days to apologize to you for my conduct and tell you how

deeply sorry I am. I really love you. No bunk. I am coming ashore at eight o'clock and I would like to see you alone then. I love you. I've been miserable for three days because I couldn't tell you so. I truly love you. Eddie."

He read the note over and quickly placed it in one of the California's official signal envelopes as the grinning face of Al appeared over the railing. Al climbed ponderously in beside Eddie.

"What's the good word, gloom hound?" inquired Al. "Gee, something must have happened to cheer you up. The last time I passed the time of day with you, I thought you would bite me."

"I've had a lucky break," said Eddie cheerfully. "Girard is going to let me off at eight o'clock for four hours."

Al whistled.

"Gee, you must know where the body is buried. You sure got a drag with that lieut."

Eddie disregarded this comment and took his friend by the arm.

"Listen, Al," he said earnestly, "do me a big favor, will you? Go up to Gladland as soon as you get ashore and hand this note to Peachy."

"Still got that red head on the brain, Eddie?" kidded Al. Then with sudden insight, "Say, did you have a battle with her? Is that what's made you so crabby?"

Al took Eddie's silence as a verification of his suspicions. The former chuckled.

"Gee, imagine a sheik like you goin' goofy over a jane. And a hard boiled skirt like Peachy at that. Why——"

Al stopped. He saw danger signals in Eddie's eyes. But the latter stifled his displeasure. It wouldn't do to fight with Al. The latter was too valuable just at that moment.

"Listen, Al, don't make any wise cracks about Peachy and don't ask me any questions. Just give her this note, will you?"

"Sure," Al complied readily and took the paper from Eddie's hand and crammed it into his own blouse.

"Just a word of warning before I bow out of here." Al said solemnly. "Drag yourself ashore and meet up with this red head as fast as you can. Searchlight Doyle blew into that dance joint I went to after you and me got bounced out of Gladland the other night. Searchlight was handing me a line how Peachy was his girl and how she has as good as accepted that bum sparkler of his that he hands to the dames that agree to play pretty with him. He said to tell you to lay off or he'd hand you plenty."

"Deliver the note, Al," urged Eddie. "and leave Searchlight to me. I licked that guy in Shanghai and, if necessary, I can hang it on him again. He won't bother me. It's Peachy I'm worrying about."

"O.K., kid, I'm Cupid's little messenger boy. S'long," waved Al and hustled down to the deck to join the liberty party, just falling in for the trip ashore.

CHAPTER XV

I

FOLLOWING the hectic departure of the disgraced Eddie Briggs and her sobbing conversation with her mother, Peachy finally managed to pull herself together sufficiently to seek her own room and wearily prepare for bed.

But she did not sleep. When she had wiped away the last tear and her agitated feelings had calmed down, a cold anger settled upon her. It was not so much the fact that Eddie had deliberately misjudged and insulted her that enraged the girl. It was hurt pride. She had thought herself so wise in the ways of men and she had acted so foolishly. She had fallen for the same line from the lips of Eddie that she had either openly ridiculed or heard with cynical indifference when other men had spoken it. She had really believed he loved her and she had returned his love. What a fool! What a little nitwit to think that any man, least of all a philandering sailor, would fall in love with her.

Peachy had been guilty of the one cardinal sin in her sophisticated lexicon: Stupidity. She did not

blame Eddie for it as much as she railed at herself.

Indeed, had her agitated feelings permitted her to be honest with herself, she might have admitted that even at that dark moment, even when she was branding him the lowest type of human being, her treacherous heart was half hoping he would come back to her. Her love for him was gravely wounded, but not dead. It was still crying out to him to offer some word of explanation that would permit her to take him back with pride restored.

Fiercely Peachy fought this traitor heart. She built a wall of ice and steel around it. In the small hours of the morning, as she lay staring at the shadowy ceiling of her bedroom, she coldly planned the future.

Men were out for all they could get from her. Well, she would play the same game. She always had, with the one exception of Eddie, and, but for him, it had proven very successful. She would flirt and dig gold more shamelessly than ever. She would sell her smiles for material favors only. She would act ruthlessly and she would forget that such a thing as love or such a man as Eddie Briggs ever existed.

Yet for two nights she did not go near Gladland. She told herself that she was tired, that she had earned a short vacation. Not for the world would she have acknowledged that the real reason was because she was afraid of encountering Eddie and uncertain of what her reaction would be if he came up to her with a smile and an apology. Or with just his smile.

On the third night after their wrathful parting, she

told herself that she was silly to lose all the rich pickings resulting from the presence of sailors at Gladland. The fleet, she ascertained from the newspapers, was sailing the following day.

Could the real motive for her presence at the dance hall that night be the secret longing for a last glimpse of the wayward Eddie? She would have killed with a look anybody who dared to suggest it.

Peachy sat grimly upon a little bench in front of a mirror in the hostesses' dressing room at the dance hall, expertly donning her war paint for the evening. Near her, before another mirror, slouched blonde, chubby Babe Murphy smoking a cigarette.

"Haven't seen you here for a couple of nights, Peachy," drawled Babe. "Sick?"

"Tired," replied Peachy without encouragement.

"Haven't seen your handsome boy friend, the one you copped the cup with, either," said Babe. "What became of him?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied the redhead calmly and was angry that her heart gave a little jump.

A scrub woman was emptying the contents of the dressing room waste basket into a huge burlap bag. She picked a photograph out of the trash and inspected it with the curiosity of menials who unexpectedly come upon something of a private nature. She laboriously raised herself from her knees and waddled over to Peachy.

"This is yours, ain't it, Miss Peachy?" she prof-

fered the picture. "Guess you threw it away by mistake."

Peachy accepted the article from the scrub woman's hand mechanically. She looked at the intimate pose of Eddie and herself, the one he had insisted upon in the photograph gallery. Her face flushed. She bristled. She tore the picture into bits and tossed them back into the waste basket.

"It's no mistake," she snapped. "That's exactly where it belongs."

Babe whistled. She was seized with sudden insight and native curiosity.

"Was that a picture of the bimbo you gave up Doyle's ring for?" she inquired.

"None of your business," retorted Peachy bitterly. "They're all saps and that's what I'm going to play them for."

"You're right, girlie," drawled Babe, inhaling. "But why get into such a huff about it?"

Peachy, having completed her toilette, arose quickly and flounced from the room. But she was a good actress. Before she reached the door, she banished her sullen expression and forced into her pretty face her professional air of smiling good humor.

As usual, a coterie of sailors and civilians, having witnessed her arrival at the hall, were gathered outside the door of the dressing room clamoring for dances. She rebuked herself sharply for unconsciously scanning the throng for Eddie. With mingled dis-

appointment and satisfaction she noted that he was not there. She embarked upon the old game of sparring with her would-be partners. Avoiding the eager ones with very few tickets in their hands, at the same time not offending them and subtly getting it over that a little higher bid would probably win a dance with her. Smiling encouragingly at the holders of fistfulls of pasteboards. Shrewdly combing the assemblage for the one best bet.

She found him.

Searchlight Doyle, chest-swollen and irritatingly egotistical as ever, had his left hand crammed full of coupons. With his right hand he was pretending to smooth out his hair. Peachy recognized the ruse and smiled wisely. His gesture exposed to its fullest advantage the handsome ring he had offered her. He was advertising the fact to her that the ring was still available. Well, why not take it? She knew that Searchlight expected an ambitious return on his investment. Once the ring was in her possession, she did not, of course, intend to satisfy his demands. But she was afraid of the consequences. Searchlight was the regulation stupid, girl-exploiting type of man. She had handled his kind by the score. She could easily handle him. And it was quite the best-looking and most expensive ring she had ever seen. He was sailing tomorrow. He would sail without the ring, she grimly determined.

She smiled sweetly and nodded to him. He triumphantly strutted up and took her arm.

"Sorry," she said regretfully to the other applicants, "I promised this first dance to Mr. Doyle."

Her smile consoled them with the thought that she would dance with them all later.

"I don't want to dance," said Searchlight abruptly when they were out of ear-shot of the others. "I want to talk to you."

That suited Peachy. He was an atrocious dancer. She might as well get the business of the ring over with as quickly as possible. She permitted him to lead her to a refreshment table. She pretended to be a little shy and nervous, which made their coming tête-à-tête all the more delicious to Searchlight. When they were seated at the table, she looked up at him with a demure, frightened smile.

"Well, baby," he blustered, "you and I are going to talk over bein' sweethearts."

She lowered her face as if in confusion. He stretched out his right hand on which the ring sparkled and beckoned to her. She reached over and coyly fingered the jewel.

"I've decided to take that ring if you still want to give it to me," she said softly but directly. Her feelings were in reality cold as ice and mercenary as a hat check girl's.

Searchlight with difficulty restrained a whoop of triumph. He only wished Eddie Briggs could be there to witness his triumph, to see the fulfillment of the veiled threat he had sent Eddie via the semaphore flags that afternoon. With a flourish and a broad

smile he removed the ring from his finger. He took Peachy's slim, creamy white wrist and drew her left hand to his. He circled the ring over her middle finger with an expression that was not good to see, that made her, in spite of her confidence, vaguely uneasy.

"That means that I can walk home with you tonight, Peachy?" he demanded in a whisper.

Her eyes and thoughts were wholly on the ring. It looked wonderful on her finger. Apparently she had not heard him. He repeated in a louder and more decisive voice what amounted to a command. She looked up and saw his flushed, desiring face. She frowned a little and bit her lip. Then she laughed. Her attitude was neither of affirmation or denial. She reached over and gave Searchlight a flirtatious little shove.

"Searchlight, you're such a tease," she said noncommittedly. "Let's dance."

"No, let's talk," he protested firmly.

She sank back into her chair. He was very sure that he had won her, gloating in his victory. Inwardly she was branding him a stupid oaf.

"When I first saw you, honey, you spoiled me for any other girl in port," he plied her with heavy-handed flattery.

"Applesauce," not "honey," she thought to herself. She let him rave, absorbed in admiring the ring.

Searchlight looked over her shoulder, seeking a more

secluded nook. His eye met three hostesses sitting at a nearby refreshment table, evidently awaiting escorts who had departed in search of a remiss waiter. He recognized the girls. All were old flames of his, recipients of presents from him in return for favors. Their faces bore guying, sarcastic smiles. They made him very uncomfortable. He shot a quick glance at Peachy and saw to his relief that she was unaware of these three uninvited critics of his love-making.

"Let's go over where we can talk more privately," he suggested, rising and taking her arm.

Her eyes were still on the ring. She obeyed him indulgently. It wouldn't be long now before she would find some excuse for leaving him. She was turning possible subterfuges over in her mind. She could, for instance, tell him that Jake Kiernan did not permit a hostess to sit out more than one dance with the same man. Jake had his standards of propriety to maintain. That excuse had the added virtue of being true. Though truth didn't seem to mean much in dealing with a man.

They found a table in a corner, protected by a section of unoccupied chairs. Peachy picked up a menu card. She was neither thirsty nor hungry, hadn't been for three days, but stimulating the desire for refreshments would be a method of stalling her amorous suitor.

"I'm thirsty, Searchlight," she suggested. "I'd really like a nice pineapple crush."

"Sure," he agreed. "I'll have one too, whatever it is. You can have as many as you like."

He looked around blusteringly for a waiter. All of Jake Kiernan's servitors seemed to be otherwise occupied for the moment. Searchlight bellowed. He rose from his chair and scanned the room. Not a waiter in sight.

"Wait right here, cutie," he patted her shoulder. "I'll get them pineapple crushes myself."

He bustled off, filled with self importance and expectancy. She wondered if this were not a propitious moment in which to disappear. A vague unfulfilled want within her held her in Gladiand She looked around with ill concealed eagerness. Not for the world, of course, would she have acknowledged that she was hoping for the appearance of Eddie Briggs and was reluctant to leave the dance hall as long as there was a chance of seeing him.

II

Meantime, Eddie's messenger, Al Pearce, had made a cautious entrance into the dance hall through the back door. Al was not quite sure what kind of a reception awaited him there after the fracas of three nights back. He was taking no chances. Immediately he ran almost head on into one of the bouncers who had ejected Eddie and himself onto the lawn of the park in the rear of the hall. It was too late for Al to avoid this Nemesis. He could only walk boldly by.

The attendant regarded the sailor intently. The former smiled. He even said, "Good evening." He had not recognized Pearce at all. Kiernan's orders were to be especially nice to sailors that night, their last in port before sailing.

Al gulped with relief and regarded the scene with confidence. One of Searchlight's ex-sweethearts, who had been sending Peachy's would-be lover sarcastic messages with her eyes, saw Al coming and quickly deserted her two other companions. It was the same girl who had slapped him three nights before on account of his over-boldness. Her present escort had been gone fifteen minutes now. She was angry and looking for revenge. Al would be useful in teaching the absent partner a lesson. Besides, Al was a good spender and she had long since regretted acting so primly with him.

She now walked up to the sailor and greeted him effusively.

"Gee, Al, it's great to see you again," she gushed. "I thought you were never coming back. I'm sorry I acted so silly the other night."

Al's evening was made at once.

"That's all right, kid," he beamed. "I guess I forgot myself a little. I'm still nuts over you."

With alarm he saw Jake Kiernan bearing hostilely down upon him, recognition of Al as a trouble-maker in Jake's pale eyes. Al seized his new-found love by the arm.

"Let's go out and sit in the park a while," he hur-

riedly suggested. "I got some things to talk over."

She agreed. Al almost flung her out of the back door. They found a bench in the park. He stole an arm around her. She snuggled nearer. Soon they were deep in an intimate conversation. Her blonde head sank upon his shoulder. He kissed her. He lifted his head triumphantly and looked around the dark park, down the walk lighted at the street entrance by a swinging arc.

Suddenly Al sprang up, startling his seatmate and almost causing her head to bump against the bench. He had seen a familiar figure making its way up the path. It was Eddie Briggs. For the first time since reaching Gladland, Al was reminded of the note in his blouse pocket which he had faithfully promised Eddie to deliver to Peachy. He grabbed his bewildered girl companion by the arm.

"Gee, I forgot something," he cried breathlessly to her. "Gee, I'll catch hell now. Come on!"

He fairly dragged her along with him as he dashed back into the dance hall. He looked agitatedly around. His eyes brightened up with relief. He saw Peachy alone sitting at her table in the corner. He hurried through the lanes of crowded tables and chairs over to her, pulling after him his new found sweetheart, who thought he had suddenly gone crazy.

Peachy was sitting uncertainly in the chair where Searchlight had left her. She was regarding the dazzling ring on her finger, not quite so sure now that she had been so smart in accepting it. Somehow, now

that she had the chance of thinking it over carefully alone, the joy of having won it from Searchlight was not so great as she had anticipated. Life was a pretty empty proposition after all, ring or no ring.

"Note from Eddie," cried a voice at her elbow.

She looked up, startled, to see Al Pearce take a crumpled envelope from his pocket and fling it down on the table in front of her. She looked up, unbelieving, questioningly. But before she could ask him anything, he had taken the arm of the other hostess again and was hustling her back into the park. Al, his mission fulfilled, had other things to attend to.

Hardly knowing whether or not she had heard Al aright, Peachy breathlessly took up the envelope. Her heart was pounding. A stream of relief and great pleasure was racing through her. Eddie! He had not forgotten her after all. It must be a note of apology, of explanation. Surely he would not take the trouble to send a message about anything else. She could hardly make her nervous fingers break the envelope. She extracted the note from inside and laid it upon the table. She could not trust her trembling hands to hold it.

She read Eddie's message. His profound apology for his conduct. His repeated declaration of love.

She read it over three times.

There were tears in her eyes now. But now they were tears of joy and gratitude. All her resentment toward him fled. She loved him more than she ever had in her life before.

She looked out toward the rear door through which Al and his companion had fled. She wanted to rush after him, to ask him where Eddie was, to discover if by some method she could not see Eddie and talk to him again before he sailed. Oh, she mustn't let him get away, perhaps for months, without telling him that he was forgiven, that she loved him! If it were only a note in reply to his that she could send him by Al. She arose to her feet. She started toward the door.

Then she stopped. Her hands flew to her face. She stared.

Eddie Briggs, wide eyed and anxious, was standing on the threshold.

CHAPTER XVI

I

She ran to him, all restraint or pretense of anger thrown recklessly to the winds. As she ran she called out his name, as if fearing that he would turn and escape from her. He heard her and looked eagerly around. He saw her coming, face flushed and more beautiful than ever. With a mighty sigh of relief, he held out his hands to her. She seized them in both hers, searching his face anxiously, tenderly. Neither of them spoke. They were bathed in a great happiness.

Then they realized at last that they were not alone. Passing pleasure-seekers were regarding them curiously. Peachy stole close to him, caressing his arm.

"Let's go somewhere where we can be alone," she suggested in a half whisper.

He put his arm around her and led the way out through the door into the park. They found a secluded bench. They did not sit down at once but stood facing each other, miraculously reunited in person and in love. Their hands gripped each other's tightly.

Eddie lowered his eyes and looked his shame and remorse. His lips trembled.

"I'm awfully sorry, Peachy," he gulped. "I treated you rotten."

Her eyes told him to be still. She leaned close to him and her arms went around him in an eloquent answer. She slowly lifted her face and offered him her lips in surrender. With a little cry of joy he caught her up in his own arms and pressed his lips to hers in a long, ecstatic kiss. Then he buried his head in her shoulder. He was as near crying as he had ever been in his life before. After what seemed an eternity they stood apart again and faced each other.

"Let me hear you say it, Eddie," she choked breathlessly. "Tell me that you love me."

"I love you, Peachy," said Eddie softly. "Gee, you can't imagine how much!"

She was thrilled to her very toes. She closed her eyes as he kissed her again. Then, holding her by the shoulders at arms' length from him, he gazed happily into her very bright blue eyes.

"I thought I'd never see you again, kid," he confessed. "I never felt so bad in my life as I have during the past three days."

"Did you catch the devil for being late back to the ship?" she asked solicitously.

"Sure. But that wasn't the reason I was off my feed," he insisted. "It was just thinking what a bum I had been with you and knowing that I was in love

with you. Love's funny, isn't it? Hits you all of a sudden like. Smacks you hard like a sock in the nose or typhoid fever or something."

She nodded, with smiling affirmation.

"Maybe I sound like a boob talking about it," Eddie went on, confessing his mystification over the wonderful thing that had happened to him. "But I never have been in love before."

"You're kidding me," she teased him happily.

"No—honest," he replied earnestly. "'Course I've run around with girls and kissed them and all that. What guy hasn't? But I've never felt toward a girl the way I do toward you. I don't ever want to leave you. Even if you forbid me to kiss you or even touch you, you couldn't get rid of me with a machine gun. Love's funny, all right."

"I've never been in love before either, Eddie," she said gravely. "I guess I fell for you before you fell for me. You had me knocked over from the start."

"What—even when I was chasing you and making goo-goo eyes at you that afternoon on Market Street?" he asked incredulously.

"I'm afraid so, Eddie," she confessed. "Wasn't I terrible?"

"You were wonderful," he disagreed. "I thought you were going to bite my head off and that's what made me want you all the more. I like a girl with plenty of pep and come-back."

"You see, I was head over heels in love with you when you took me home that night," Peachy explained,

breathlessly, "and that's what made me so angry and mortified and miserable when you acted as you did."

"You poor kid. I'm so sorry I——"

She pressed two fingers over his lips and ordered him to be silent.

"We won't talk about it. It's all changed now," she insisted with a consoling smile. "We love each other."

"In that case," he recovered something of his former jaunty manner, "let's tell each other who we are. For all you know, my old man's a crook or a millionaire or something."

"But I'm not in love with your father. I'm in love with you," she teased. Hastening to humor him, "But go ahead, Eddie. Tell me all about yourself and your folks. Tell me the bitter truth. I can stand it. Then I'll give you all the scandal about the Deanes. Meantime, let's sit down. I stand behind a counter all day and I dance half the night, and along about this time I don't mind getting off my feet a bit."

They sat down upon the nearby bench and Eddie launched at once into an intimate account of his family and Reno and everything. When a feller intended to ask the beautiful girl he loved to marry him, it was just as well that she knew something about him and his family first, wasn't it?

II

Searchlight Doyle was annoyed. All of Gladland's

waiters seemed to have gone out on a strike or something. He made his way to the refreshment counter without encountering one of the dark clad servitors. Moreover, there was a mob in front of the counter. It was a warm evening. Everybody was drinking the dyspepsia-defying concoctions with which Jake Kiernan paid his respects to the Volstead Act. Searchlight had to adopt football tactics in order to bore his way in to the base of supplies whence the foaming glasses of pink and brown and yellow and white thirst-quenchers were issuing. Four attendants in soiled white uniforms dispensed refreshments over the sloppy counter just as fast as their expert hands would work.

"Two pineapple crushes!" roared Searchlight, secretly feeling like a fool for mouthing such an effeminate-sounding order.

He might just as well have shouted out of the window for all the attention that was paid to him.

"Hey!" he bellowed again. "Two pineapple crushes—and make it snappy!"

A broad white back that had been bending over an ice cream can behind the counter straightened up and its owner glared at Searchlight. Its owner was over six feet tall and scaled more than two hundred pounds without an ounce of superfluous fat on him. He had a jaw that looked as if it could easily crack rocks.

"You'll wait your turn!" the attendant rasped and looked through Searchlight with a pair of gimlet black eyes. The man in the dirty white coat wiped

his fists on a still dirtier apron as if preparing to beat a tattoo on Searchlight's jaw.

Searchlight, a coward at heart, waited.

Eventually he received two glasses piled high with ice cream and whipped cream and pieces of pineapple. For this he was charged a sum that made him wince. Another look from the gimlet eyes as the check was presented and the sailor paid without question.

Searchlight had wasted fifteen minutes or more from his precious tête à tête with Peachy. He was quite sure she would wait for him. Hadn't she taken his ring? Another five minutes were consumed as he cautiously made his way through the throngs of merry-makers—hostesses and sailors and civilians—without spilling any of the contents of the glasses. He reached the table which Peachy and he had been occupying, and discovered that it was empty. He stared unbelievedly. He muttered angrily. Had she run out on him? He set down the glasses and looked rapidly around.

Al Pearce was passing with his simpering blonde inamorata. Searchlight caught him by the arm.

"Say, have you seen Peachy anywhere?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" taunted Al, his lantern-jawed face attempting to register mystery.

The blonde hostess accompanying Al combined with her jealousy of Peachy's popularity the desire for the thrill and excitement which most women derive from the sight of men battling over members of her sex.

"Peachy's out in the park with Eddie Briggs," cut in Al's partner promptly.

Al glanced at her sharply. He looked pained and frightened. Eddie would give him hell for this. The girl, as if realizing her indiscretion, made a feigned gesture of clapping her hand over her mouth, and giggled. But she saw with satisfaction that Searchlight had been stung to the quick. A tempest was about to break, and she proposed to be a spectator at it.

"Briggs can't be here," protested Searchlight. "He doesn't get ashore until ten o'clock.

"That's right," said Al promptly.

"But I saw him not five minutes ago," maintained the girl, ignoring Al's silent commands that she keep her mouth shut.

That was enough for Searchlight. He swaggered out, like an avenging fury, the two glasses of pineapple crush held incongruously in his hands. He stormed through the rear door and out into the park. He explored the shadows with his eyes. Finally he saw them, two huddled figures entwined in each other's arms on a park bench. With a bellow of rage Doyle descended upon them.

He was drawn up to his full height in front of them before they realized his presence.

"So—*here* you are!" fairly yelled Searchlight, pointing an accusing pineapple crush glass at Peachy. She looked up at him, frightened, and shot an appealing

look at Eddie, begging him to understand. In the happiness of her reunion with the man she loved, she had clean forgotten all about Searchlight.

Eddie, bristling, sprang to his feet and clenched his fists. Searchlight angrily threw the glasses of soda into some nearby bushes.

"We've shared a lot of girls, Briggs," snarled Searchlight. "We've fought over them, and generally, I admit, you've won. But here's one jane I'm not sharing with anybody. She's mine and I can prove it!"

Eddie looked at him in surprise. Searchlight was so positive of himself. There must be something behind this. Peachy had arisen and started to speak. Eddie put out a protecting arm and prevented her explanation. He wanted to work this out himself.

"Just what do you mean by that, Searchlight?" Eddie asked quietly.

For an answer Searchlight suddenly reached out and seized Peachy's arm. He brought her left hand into view and pointed triumphantly to his ring adorning her middle finger.

"That ring is what I mean," roared Searchlight. "She took it voluntarily and all that goes with it. When a girl accepts that ring, she's mine. You know that."

Peachy almost fainted. The ring on her finger had completely escaped her mind. She was nearly sick with fright. If only Eddie would let her explain. She attempted to speak.

"Wait a minute!" Eddie rasped in a choked, incredulous voice.

There was a terrible look upon his face. He seized her wrist and forced his eyes to tell him that the ring was indeed there. The ring that no girl accepted unless she accepted Searchlight also. Tricky Peachy! Eddie's jaw trembled. His whole body was tense. He almost gave way to a physical nausea. She loved him! Bah! He had been right about her in the first place. Just a cheap little gold digger. A bad girl. Pulling this high and mighty stuff on him. Making him fall in love with her, worship her because of her superior goodness. All the time letting Searchlight, the lowest type of girl-chaser, paw over her. All for a cheap piece of jewelry that was probably a fake.

Eddie's face was livid with rage. Peachy tried to take him by the arm, to explain. He shoved her roughly away from him.

"You see how it is," swaggered Searchlight. "I guess you better beat it, hey?"

It was too much for Eddie's wrought-up state of mind. Something snapped. With a snarl that was like that of some wild beast unleashed, he smashed out his fist at Searchlight. It landed directly on the sailor's jaw. Searchlight crashed down as if he had been shot with a high explosive. His head struck the iron arm of the park bench with a terrible impact. Knocked unconscious, his body rolled from the bench to the ground and sprawled limply on the ground. His white face was in the dust.

CHAPTER XVII

Not realizing that Searchlight had struck the iron bench in his fall and was unconscious, Eddie, blind with rage, walked menacingly around the fallen gob waving his fists and taunting him.

"Come on. Get up and fight, you bum!" defied Eddie. "Don't let a little tap on the chin annoy you. Come on!"

Peachy, seeing that Searchlight had been hurt, and beside herself with fear, tried in vain to clutch Eddie's arm. He angrily pushed her away. He hated her now. If she had been a man, he would have lashed out at her in the same way he had dealt with Searchlight.

Before she could do anything further toward bringing either sailor to his senses, a new complication swept in. Two sailors from the Washington, Searchlight's ship, had witnessed the knockout from a nearby bench. They now came running into the scene. Eager for excitement on their last night ashore and angered because a man from another vessel had beaten up their shipmate, they rushed upon Eddie with blood in their eyes. He squared off to meet them. He welcomed them with pleasure. His lacerated feelings demanded

A Paramount Picture. *The Fleet's In*

PEACHY FOOLS WITH DYNAMITE AS SHE FLIRTS WITH SEARCHLIGHT FOR HIS RING.

revenge. He wanted to smash everything in sight, to kill somebody. He set upon the two newcomers with such violence that one was sprawled upon the ground immediately and the other was setting up loud cries for help.

The cries shortly brought on pandemonium.

From inside the dance hall sailors heard the shouts and came piling out the rear door. Their girl partners were with them, filled with delicious excitement. Al Pearce was in the van of the onrushing horde.

"Yeah, Eddie!" he cried, taking in the situation at a glance. "Come on, you California gobs, clean 'em up!"

Sailors from Searchlight's ship, the Washington, substantially represented, flung themselves into the fray on the opposite side. A battle royal ensued. Fists flew. The sound of flesh making sharp contact with flesh filled the air. Over a hundred husky, excited sailors fought and wrestled and kicked and gouged. The little park seemed filled with them. They attacked under the trees, in the bushes, on the lawn. Embattled youths had necks and arms cut by the sharp gravel of the paths and did not notice their injuries. Grunts and cries of pain, oaths and the thud of bodies.

In the center of it all, battling like a demon, was Eddie. His curly blond hair was matted to his head. His face was red where fists had found their marks. His lips were bleeding. His shoulders were bare and his blouse, torn off him, hung around his waist. Still

he was fired with a demoniacal fury. Every blow that he landed seemed to him a part payment for the terrible wrong that had been dealt him by Peachy and Searchlight. His arms were punch-weary. And still his enemies rushed on.

Near him fought Al and a group of sailors from the California. Al was right in his element, having the time of his life. His long arms did fierce, yeoman service and his booming voice urged his mates on.

Peachy, beside herself with fear, and believing if only she could get to Eddie for a second and explain she could stop this awful slaughter before somebody was killed, tried in vain to force her way through the seething mob. She pushed and clawed. Her hair was disheveled. Her face was bruised from chance blows. Still she fought forward.

Amid it all, Searchlight, his lips ashen, his brain still dead to the world, lay where he had fallen. Fighting gobs milled over him. No one had the time or inclination to pull his limp body out of harm's way.

Early in the battle Jake Kiernan had rushed to the rear and surveyed the scene. Fearful of the consequences to Gladland's reputation, he hastily summoned his corps of four professional bouncers. They scurried into the fray. But they were like chaff in a hurricane. They could make no impression, lustily as they tried. Every gob they encountered, whether he was Eddie Briggs' friend or foe, looked upon Kiernan's bouncers as common enemies and slugged them unmercifully. Finally all four of them, much the

worse for wear, reported back to the agitated Jake.

"It's no use, boss. They're too far gone for us to handle. You'll have to call the police."

Jake agreed reluctantly. He had had dealings with the police before. They had an unfortunate habit of blaming upon him any untoward happenings in the vicinity of his pleasure palace. Its reputation was none too salubrious with the authorities as it was.

But he couldn't allow these crazy gobs to kill each other. Already that one sprawled out there near the bench looked dead. Jake pulled a police whistle out of his pocket and blew it with all his might.

Two blocks away a policeman standing in the entrance of a butcher shop, mopping his perspiring red face with a handkerchief and passing the time of day with the burly German proprietor, heard the shrill blasts. He hurried to the sidewalk and looked right and left. The whistle sounded again. He started on a lope toward the little park. Halfway up the main gravel path the sight that met the officer's eyes caused him to turn and scurry back to the street. He drew his own whistle and blew it with all his might. Then he sought a police telephone box and sent in a call to the precinct station for a patrol wagon and a bevy of bluecoats.

By this time two other blue uniformed guardians of the peace, puffing from their haste, joined him.

"What's up, Mike?" gasped one.

"Bunch of sailors killing each other up by Gladland," he replied. "Come on!"

All three drew their clubs and trotted ponderously toward the park, to the amazement of the onlooking populace, some of whom out of curiosity followed in their perspiring wake.

Unaware of the approaching hand of the law, the excited and badly punished gobs battled on. And Peachy, frantic with anxiety and almost exhausted, continued her frenzied efforts to reach Eddie before he should fall before his antagonists.

"Eddie! Eddie!" she cried many times. But he was too closely pressed to give heed to her even if he had heard her call.

Fate finally halted Peachy's mad rush. Al Pearce lashed out at a Washington gob, a husky ship's cook, near her. Al's victim bounded against Peachy as he fell. The force of his big body knocked her to the ground just out of range of the crushing heels of a score or so of the fighters. Dazed, she huddled in a half sitting position at the base of a eucalyptus tree and half consciously rubbed her hands over her eyes, striving to regain her senses.

From the group of squealing hostesses on the fringe of the fight, pale-faced Mamie caught sight of the fallen Peachy. With a cry of sympathy she rushed over to her and, sinking to the ground beside her, tried with her handkerchief to wipe the blood from a small gash in Peachy's forehead.

"Peachy, it's Mamie," she repeated to the befuddled girl. "Let me take you home."

Peachy, half hearing her, shook her head in the

negative and made vague motions with her hand to push Mamie away.

At that moment the trio of badly winded but belligerent policemen appeared on the run.

"Cheese it, the cops!" rang out the cry from a leather-lunged throat.

Bluejackets began scurrying in every direction. It was as if a giant wind had roared down and scattered them. They dived into underbrush. They took to the winding paths leading to adjacent streets. Several ducked in through the rear door of Gladland.

Only Eddie Briggs was left standing over the still unconscious body of Searchlight Doyle. Eddie's right eye, black and blue, was nearly closed. Blood was trickling from several cuts in his face. His frayed blouse hung in shreds from his waist. There was a wild and unholy look in his face and his two fists were still churning around as if seeking new enemies to smash. He snarled and struggled as two policemen, leaping upon him from the rear, pinioned his arms to his sides. The other cop bent over the fallen body of Searchlight.

Taking courage at the sight of the police, Jake Kiernan, his bouncers and several of the almost awe-stricken hostesses, in their flimsy evening gowns, approached and stood in a semi-circle around the principal protagonists. The officer arose from his stooped posture over Searchlight and took a small thumb-dirty note book and a stub of a pencil from his pocket.

"Now, who's responsible for this?" he asked sternly.

Jake Kiernan stepped forward, anxious to absolve himself at any cost.

"That sailor there!" he accused loudly, pointing a self-righteous finger at Eddie. "I threw him out of the dance hall three nights ago because he started a fight. I didn't see him come in tonight or I never would have allowed him in my place. He knocked out this other sailor and that started a free-for-all. It took place out here, not in the hall, on public property. I did all I could to stop it, officer. I ain't responsible for it in any way. You know I've always tried——"

"That'll do," the officer disposed of Kiernan by pushing him away. "We'll attend to you later." He turned to Eddie, still held with an iron grip by the other two policemen. "Did you knock this man unconscious?"

Eddie was staring with curled lips down at the sprawling body of Searchlight. He was still daring Searchlight to get up and fight. He was unaware, in his wrought-up condition, that his rival was dead to the world for the moment.

"Yes, I did it!" rasped Eddie. "And if he'll get up like a man instead of lying there like a yellow dog, I'll do it again!"

"Is that so?" replied the officer threateningly. "Well, I guess we'll stick you some place where you won't be such a menace to life and limb, young man. And when we're through with you, maybe Uncle Sam will have something to say to you, too. A session in the Mare Island brig will cool you off a little."

The metallic clang of a police patrol-wagon gong came up through the trees from the nearby streets. Two more officers arrived on a run up the path.

"Carry this guy into the dance hall and bring him to," ordered the police sergeant with the note book, pointing to Searchlight. "No, he ain't dead. Just knocked cuckoo for the time bein'. We'll take care of this battlin' bantam." He nodded to the officers holding Eddie. "Take him to the wagon!"

The newly arrived policemen picked up Searchlight none too gently and started toward the rear door of Gladland. Searchlight was beginning to groan and hold his hand to his wounded jaw and head. The procession of three cops and Eddie Briggs, with the sergeant and his note book in the lead, took up the march down the path toward the waiting conveyance. Eddie, not quite sure what was happening to him, sagged wearily in the officers' arms. They had to fairly push him along. His face was still set in an angry sneer.

Peachy, shaking off her daze, from her position on the ground under the tree looked wildly around. She could not understand why the fighting had suddenly ceased. She darted glances here and there looking for Eddie. Then she saw him being led down the path by the cops. She sprang at once to her feet, pushing away the efforts of Mamie to hold her back. She ran swiftly down the path, crying Eddie's name. She caught up with the little group, circled around them and stood in front of her lover and his captors, bar-

ring the way. The policemen stopped, looking at her agitated face in surprise.

"Don't take him away," she cried to them. "It wasn't his fault. I'm to blame!"

The officers looked questioningly from her to Eddie. She seized the sailor by the arm and pleaded to him with her eyes.

"Eddie, please let me explain to you," she begged. "Then I'll tell these officers everything and they'll let you go."

A taunting little laugh croaked from the bleeding lips of Eddie. A cruel laugh. He stared at her as if she were a hated thing. He seized her wrist and flung her arm away from him as if it would contaminate him.

"You've got a swell nerve," he hurled at her. "Go back to your Searchlight. He's got his senses by this time."

"Eddie, listen to me. Searchlight doesn't——"

"Get away!" he screamed. "God, haven't you caused enough trouble already!"

She clapped her hand over her mouth to prevent herself from crying out at the terrible injustice he was doing her. It was as if he had struck her a blow across the face, a blow that reached her heart. She felt physically sick. She wondered if she were going to faint.

One of the officers took her by the arm and gently drew her out of their line of march.

"It ain't no use, young lady," he sympathized.

"Come down and talk to him in the cooler in the morning when he ain't so nutty."

They resumed their advance toward the street. Peachy stood helplessly watching them. A crowd was gathered about the patrol wagon drawn up at the curb. Several of the hostesses had followed the procession from the dance hall. They avidly supplied the details of the fight to anxiously inquiring bystanders. The officers marched their captive to the rear step of the wagon and roughly pushed him in, following him themselves into the dark interior of the prisoner van. With a glance backward to see that his passengers were all set, the bored driver shot the car into gear and, with a roar from its exhaust pipe and a clanging of its bell, it started Eddie Briggs on his way to jail.

The patrol gong shot through Peachy like a knife. Mamie, anxiously following her, had now reached her side and was renewing her entreaties that her friend allow her to guide her home. Unheeding, Peachy stood watching the wagon lurching and swaying.

With an involuntary "No!" Peachy shook off Mamie's comforting arm and darted down to the sidewalk and into the street. Half maddened, she started running wildly after the speeding wagon, crying Eddie's name after him.

But her pursuit was hopeless. The wagon swung around a distant corner. Peachy's mad flight slowed down. It became an almost breathless walk. Finally, from sheer exhaustion, she was forced reluctantly to stop. She reeled out of the street, narrowly missing

several passing cars, and sank down upon the curbing.

Her head dropped. Her tear-filled eyes caught sight of Searchlight's ring gleaming on her finger in the light of the arc lamp overhead like an evil grinning omen. With a convulsive cry she wrenched it off her finger and threw it into the darkness in back of her with all her might. Then, burying her face in her arms, she gave way to convulsive sobs.

It was thus that the faithful and frightened Mamie finally caught up with her. Unable to comfort the weeping girl, Mamie summoned a passing taxi cab and, with the help of the driver, fairly lifted her into the car. The driver, receiving Peachy's address from Mamie and starting his cab on its way, cynically observed to himself that the swell looking red head certainly had a beaut of a crying jag.

CHAPTER XVIII

PEACHY awoke the next morning, weary and wan looking, after a sleepless night. She had thought about Eddie and their plight all through the endless dark.

She *must* in some way explain to him about Searchlight and the ring. She could not, would not separate from him letting him think the worst of her. It was cruel, unfair. She did not blame him for taking appearances at their face value and leaping at conclusions as to the relationship between his rival and her. Things had looked bad for her, she freely admitted. But it could all be explained. The ring meant nothing to her. She had been foolish, ghastly foolish, but she had been guilty of no wrong-doing.

It *must* all be explained. Telling the simple truth would do it. Then Eddie could use his own judgment. If he chose to smash their wonderful, newly found love for each other, that would be a terrible tragedy. She did not know quite how she would bear it. But, even if that happened, she could leave him knowing that he had heard the truth from her. Her conscience would be wiped clean.

He *must* listen to her. The first thing in the morn-

ing she would go to the jail and make him listen.

Her washed-out appearance after she had dressed that fateful morning so clearly betrayed something amiss that Mrs. Deane glanced at her sharply. When Peachy refused any breakfast, her mother resolved to speak.

"What's the matter with you?" she asked sharply. "You haven't slept and you won't eat. You're pale and tired."

Peachy tried to summon a smile to her wan face.

"I'm fine, mother," she fibbed.

"Are you worrying about that sailor?" her mother guessed. "I thought you were through with him."

Peachy said nothing. Her eyes begged her mother to stop questioning her. She did not want to break down. She seized her hat and fairly flew to the door and down the stairs. Not until she had reached the sidewalk did she venture to slow down to a walk.

She recalled the address of the jail to which in all probability they had taken Eddie. Mamie had supplied this, profiting by the experience learned from visits to a brother who had once run afoul of the law in a fashion similar to Eddie. Peachy waited at the street corner and boarded an electric car.

The jail was an ancient and dirty looking brick building. It frowned down menacingly at her. She wondered behind which of those little barred windows Eddie was confined and what dark thoughts of her he was harboring. She walked up the well worn stone

steps and past the policeman at the door. He looked at her curiously but made no attempt to question her.

In the long, dingy corridor of the jail she saw Eddie's friend, Al Pearce approaching and hurried eagerly up to him.

"Hello, Peachy," he greeted her gloomily.

"Is Eddie here?" she questioned. "Have they let him go yet?"

"Yeh, he's here," said Al. "And he's liable to stay here for some time. I just been talkin' to the judge tryin' to get him off. Told a lot of lies and tried to prove Eddie wasn't to blame. But I didn't get any place. He has to stand trial at ten o'clock this mornin'. The fleet sails at noon. Gee, what a tough break."

He glanced at Peachy in none too friendly fashion. After all, wasn't she chiefly to blame for Eddie's trouble? Trust a skirt to raise hell with a guy every time. Especially a pippin like Peachy. Even a smart bird like Eddie eventually fell for women, stuck his head into the noose.

"What'll they do to him, Al?" she asked, lips trembling.

"I dunno," sighed Al. "Probably they'll send him up for thirty days for disturbance of the peace. If the judge is a tough guy, he may call it assault with intent to kill and give him more. Then, after they get through with him ashore, the Navy will step in and hand him somethin'. The Navy is hard on you when you start a fight ashore, especially when you get

pinched and miss your ship. It looks like a stretch in the Mare Island brig for Eddie."

"Can't we do anything, Al?" pleaded Peachy.

"Not a thing. I done all I could already and it didn't get him anything. I got to come back at ten o'clock with ten or twelve of the boys from the ship and be witnesses. Of course we'll give Eddie all we can. But Searchlight and a bunch of loud talkin' lads from the Washington will be among them present also to tell the other side of the story. So—what the hell!"

Peachy twisted her fingers helplessly.

"I must see him, Al," she said. "I want to tell him something important. How can I see him?"

Al shook his head. He found himself sympathizing with her in spite of himself. She was a good kid. She couldn't have treated Eddie as dirty as he seemed to think she had. Gee, how could a dame in her right senses prefer that dumb Doyle to Eddie?

"I wouldn't try to see him now if I were you," Al offered sincere advice. "He ain't feelin' too good yet. It would only make trouble."

"But I *must*, Al," she insisted.

"Well, if you've made up your mind to it, I guess you got to," he admitted. "Go in and see the warden. He's in that office there. First door to your right. He'll let you see Eddie. Tell him you're engaged to him or something. Eddie can see people. He ain't up for murder."

The warden was seated behind an old-fashioned

rolled top desk smoking his early morning cigar. Yes, she could see Prisoner Briggs if she liked. He was in a sulky mood, however; wouldn't talk to anybody. Was she a friend of his? Yes? Too bad. No, no, he couldn't discuss Eddie's release. He would have to stand trial and what happened to him later was up to the Judge. No, no. No use talking. "Show the young lady to Briggs' cell." This last to the turnkey who sat reading the morning paper in a chair near the door in the warden's office.

The turnkey led her down the corridor through a heavy oak door in the rear and into a section of the building containing a row of cells. A dirty bundle of rags, male, in the nearest cell groaned alcoholically. A frowsy, puffy-eyed woman in the next cell stood grasping the iron bars of her compartment and stared dully at Peachy as she passed with her escort. The girl recoiled and shivered. At the next cubby hole the turnkey stopped.

"He's in there," he said dully. "Give you five minutes."

He did not open the iron door. He left her to converse with the object of her search through the bars.

Eddie Briggs' temporary quarters were small and dingy. A pale, anemic light streamed in through a small barred window near the ceiling. A low iron cot and a stool were the only furnishings. Eddie had refused breakfast and was now walking up and down in his cell like a caged animal. His wild rage of the

previous night had calmed down somewhat. It had given way to a calm, resigned resentment toward the world in general and one Peachy Deane in particular.

She was nervous and excited.

"Eddie," she called tentatively, and waited anxiously.

He turned at the sound of her voice. He stared at her a moment, making sure who she was in the uncertain light. He shot a hostile look at her and turned his back abruptly on her.

"Eddie," she cried again, "you've got to let me explain to you about the ring."

For a moment she thought he had not heard her. Then quickly he turned around and blasted out his bewildered hate at her.

"Explain!" he cried. "I wouldn't believe you under oath! I believed you once, and it was the biggest mistake of my life."

He came close to her as he hurled this at her. She reeled under the verbal blow. She reached in excitedly and seized his blouse.

"Eddie, I love you," she faltered. "I'll do anything, say anything to get you out of here. I——"

He tore himself roughly away from her.

"Why do you come here rubbing it in?" he almost shouted. "Why can't you stay away and leave me alone? Go ahead—get out! Get out quick!" He shook himself and resumed his walking up and down, muttering. "Gee, to think I wanted to marry you!" he flung at her, as if it were something that had hap-

pened a hundred years ago and was an object of wonder to him now.

She went on pleading, tears in her eyes, but he would not listen. It was as if she were talking to the inanimate bars.

Finally the turnkey appeared noiselessly behind her. He touched her on the shoulder.

"Time's up," he said indifferently.

"No—no!" she cried. "I haven't told him what I wanted to say."

"You've told me plenty," Eddie sneered at her. "I don't want to hear any more."

"Come along, young woman," said the turnkey more decisively. He seized her under the arm and urged her along.

She tried to shake him off. She called back frantically to Eddie. Tears were streaming down her cheek. He paid no attention to her. The turnkey had to place both hands under her arms and fairly drag her down the corridor.

"Eddie! Eddie!" she screamed.

The woman in the next cell laughed mockingly. The alcoholic old man prisoner was aroused and roared crazily. The warden was attracted by the din and came stalking from his office.

"See here, young lady, this won't do at all," he called out sharply.

He helped the turnkey drag his burden through the door of the cell building into the office section. They left her near the main entrance to the building. She

was dazed and half fainting. Her hand went to her forehead aimlessly.

Suddenly something whirled in her head. She slumped down unconscious. The warden and the turnkey, who had been watching her anxiously, sprang to her side. The former rushed to a water cooler. He dashed cold water into her pale face.

Ten minutes later Peachy, still not entirely recovered, stumbled out of the building. She stood for a long time on the sidewalk before she summoned the strength to board a street car for her home.

Through it all the obsession still clung to her that she must in some way see Eddie again and make him listen to the truth.

CHAPTER XIX

I

The ride back home in the jolty street car, which Peachy would ordinarily have found tedious, did her good. Nowhere is one left so thoughtfully alone in an insolated world of one's own as in a trolley full of strangers. The girl was given a welcome opportunity to think. There was no Eddie to revile her and no mother to haunt her with anxious, questioning looks. Her frayed nerves settled down. Her brain became cleared of its fog. She even began giving a thought to her personal appearance. She carefully wiped the tear blotches from under her eyes. She became conscious that her dress, donned fresh and clean that morning, had become crumpled and dirt-streaked from contact with the dusty corridor floor of the jail building.

She had no definite idea of what she was doing when she boarded the home-bound car. Now she began carefully to plan her future action. She would go home and change her clothes and repair with cosmetics the damage which her recent emotional scene with Eddie had done to her face. At ten o'clock, when

Eddie's trial opened, she would appear in the court room. From then on her plans became rather indefinite. In some way she would save him. If it were at the cost of her own reputation, she would sacrifice it. She owed it to him. She had caused him this trouble.

When the thing was over, he could take whatever attitude he chose toward her. At least she would have satisfied her own conscience and her sense of fairness.

Mrs. Deane was surprised and questioning when Peachy walked into the living room of the apartment twenty minutes later. The smile on the girl's face, a little forced to be sure, reassured her.

"Whatever is the matter, Lucy?" asked her mother. "I thought you had left for the store. Are you ill or something?"

"I feel fine," declared the girl. "But I slipped and fell in the street car—caught my heel in the step, I guess—and I had to come home and change my dress. Mr. Schwarz won't stand for us wearing soiled clothes, you know."

Mrs. Dean did not question this. She had had previous experience with her daughter's fastidiousness in the matter of her attire. Peachy disappeared into her bedroom. Ten minutes later she came out again, face freshened, hair in neat array and her slim body encased chicly in her very best afternoon gown.

"You're not going to wear that dress to work in that dirty store, are you?" asked her mother in some dismay. The memory of the hour of labor it had

cost her to clean and press its frills was fresh in her mind.

"It's a very special occasion," explained her daughter. "Besides, the store isn't really dirty. And I'll take good care of the dress."

"Now that you're here," suggested her mother, "you might as well eat a bite of breakfast. It's still on the table. You said you didn't feel like it before."

"I did feel a little frowsy when I got up," confessed Peachy. "But I'm fine now. I'll eat it."

She could not explain even to herself the strange calm which had settled down upon her. It must be like the bracing, optimistic feeling that seizes a really brave soldier the minute before the zero hour sounds and he is bound over the top, she thought. Well, she would be a good soldier. And she had a flash of foresight in which she envisioned everything coming out all right. It would have to. Wasn't she innocent? And wasn't Eddie innocent, too?

She consumed her cereal and coffee with considerable relish. She touched her napkin to her lips, not so heavily as to mar her rouge, and rose buoyantly to her feet. She went to a mirror and carefully enclosed her shiny red hair under her tight fitting and very jaunty little hat. She turned to her mother and kissed her.

"Good bye, mother," she smiled. "Don't worry about me a bit. Everything is coming out all right. I'm fine."

She hurried from the room and fairly skipped down

the stairs. Long after the sound of her lively feet had ceased to echo back to her, Mrs. Deane stood still, listening, wondering, worrying. Something amiss was in the air. It was the first time her daughter had failed to share an important confidence with her. She set about mechanically to move the breakfast things to the kitchen.

The short hatchet-faced man with the bristling black moustache who was approaching the front door of the apartment house would have darted a second and more searching look at the red headed beauty as she passed if she had not been moving so swiftly. As it was, his eyes were buried in the paper in his hand which he was reading. He was concerned over whether he had the right address named in the document. He was barely conscious that a girl had sped past him. He did not for the moment connect her with his mission.

The janitor was sweeping the sidewalk in front of the apartment.

"Does Peachy Deane live here?" asked the man with the paper in a harsh voice.

The old, stoop-shouldered janitor had seen legal looking papers like that before. Peachy was a favorite of his. He had just seen her pass but he didn't intend to enlighten this questioner to that effect.

"Yes, she does," said the janitor shortly.

"Is she home?"

"Don't know. Suppose so." The janitor went on with his sweeping. He cast an apprehensive glance over his shoulder as his questioner stepped to the

doorway and rang the Deanes' bell. There was an answering click at the latch and the stranger stepped in.

Mrs. Deane stood in the half opened doorway of her apartment as the new arrival reached the head of the stairs.

"Is Peachy Deane in?" he asked.

"No," replied her mother, anxiety written on her pale face.

The man drew his formidable looking paper with a flourish.

"I have a subpoena for her to appear at the trial of Edward Briggs as a witness at the jail building at ten o'clock," he announced.

Mrs. Deane blanched and trembled. She had not listened carefully. She thought this stranger had come to arrest her daughter. He looked like a detective, moustached and flat-footed.

"She's not here," Mrs. Dean said hurriedly. Her voice was so agitated that the process-server leaped to the conclusion that she was lying.

"I'll take a look around," he said brusquely and forced his way into the living room. He thrust his heavy jowls into the bedroom, kitchen and out upon the patio until he was satisfied that the elderly woman was telling the truth. She followed him like a hen whose brood of chickens is threatened. He turned to her finally.

"Where is she?" he asked. "It'll go hard with her if she doesn't show up at the trial."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Dean. "All I know is

that my daughter is a good girl. She hasn't done anything. It's all a mistake."

"No mistake," insisted the stranger. "It's all written plainly here—Peachy Deane. There was a fight and a sailor got pretty near killed. She's supposed to be the cause of it. She'll have to testify at the trial this morning."

"It's the wrong Deane then," declared her mother. "Lucy hasn't seen any sailors for three days. The only sailor she knows wouldn't get into fights. Why, I sat here with him myself for almost an hour the other night showing him photographs. He's a perfect gentleman."

"Name Eddie Briggs?"

"Why—yes. That *was* his name."

"That's the guy. He's a sure bet to go to jail for a spell. And your daughter may go with him if I don't locate her. Guess I'll try Schwarz' Department Store. I understand she works there."

He stalked out of the room and down the stairs. Mrs. Deane flew at once to the telephone. Peachy would have had just time enough to reach the store if she were really bound there. She got the head of Peachy's department on the 'phone. No, Miss Deane had not appeared. Indeed she had just telephoned five minutes previously that she would not be in that morning.

Mrs. Deane hung up the receiver thoughtfully. Then she walked decisively into her bedroom and took her hat from the closet. She carefully locked the apart-

ment and walked, troubled but resolute, down to the street. Finding the friendly policeman on the corner, she secured the address of the jail building.

"Not in trouble, Mrs. Deane, are you?" he asked in friendly solicitude.

"No, thanks, Connor," she replied, and wished it were true.

She hailed the next street car.

II

On her way to the trolley car which would take her to the court room, Peachy stopped to buy a morning paper. She opened it up in the car. She was surprised to find the case of Eddie Briggs smeared in big headlines over the front page:

FLEET SAILORS IN
FIERCE BATTLE OVER
DANCE HALL BEAUTY

POLICE IN RIOT CALL QUELL FREE-FOR-ALL. BLUEJACKET NEAR DEATH

News was scarce at that season. This story had all the elements dear to the heart of editors and reporters on the sensational sheets. A fight, sex, the menace of death. They had played it up to the limit. For some reason they had failed to ascertain the name of the "dance hall beauty" at the bottom of it all. Jake Kiernan had rendered Peachy yeoman service in forc-

ing his employees by threat and force of persuasion not to divulge her identity. But all the rest of it was there. And, according to the newspaper story, Searchlight Doyle had, unless good luck intervened, participated in his last brawl.

Peachy was deeply worried. There would be a mob at the trial.

Her fears were confirmed when she reached the jail building. The curious were on hand in full force. They stood gaping around the outside of the gaunt building. They milled around the corridor inside waiting for the trial to open. The place swarmed with reporters. She walked into a sea of avid, thrill-hungry faces. On every hand she heard scandal-mongering tongues speculating as to who the girl at the bottom of it all was and whether or not she would show up at the trial. One authoritative voice asserted loudly that a subpoena-server was out after her even now and that she was expected at any moment. Peachy was grateful that nobody seemed to associate her own appearance with this fact. Several male glances of appreciation were shot at her. But she expected that. It always happened to her. And today she was dressed at her flashiest. Extra short, flimsy skirt, sheer silk stockings, a chic hat on her red locks, a summer fur about her neck and an expensive bag dangling from her wrist.

She was glad to recognize Al Pearce amid this mass of hostile faces and hurried up to him at once. He drew her into a corner to talk to her.

"No use your showin' up here," he protested. "You don't need to get mixed up in this. They're out after you. You should have ducked them. You're the one all these bums have come to see."

"But I have to help Eddie if I possibly can," she insisted. "I'll testify for him if they'll let me."

"It would only hurt him," declared Al. "We've done all we can. I brought all these guys from the ship to tell what a great fellow Eddie is." He indicated a group of six sailors leaning in conversation against the opposite wall. "I even got Lieutenant Girard to come. He's a friend of Eddie's. He's in talking to the Judge now, trying to get him to let the Navy take over the case. Girard figures he can do something if they will only let Eddie have a court martial instead of trying him here. This Judge is a holy terror in cases like this, especially where there's a dame involved."

Lieutenant Girard walked out of the door of an office opening onto the corridor. One glance at his sober face convinced both Al and Peachy that he was not the bearer of glad tidings. Both rushed up to him.

"I had no luck," said the officer, shaking his head. "Judge Hartley is all set to go ahead with the case. They are charging Briggs with assault. It will probably go hard with him."

Al introduced the girl to the Lieutenant.

"I'm the one they fought over," she admitted flushing a little.

Girard glanced at her sharply. She seemed so ut-

terly miserable that he did not have the heart to censure her.

"If I were you, I wouldn't stay here," he advised not unkindly. "You'll only do yourself harm."

"But I must do something for Eddie," she declared.

"You can't help him. The best we can hope for is thirty days in jail ashore and then the Navy will give him a court martial. It's hard lines that he has to miss his ship. That will count against him in the court martial."

Peachy slumped miserably against the wall. Al Pearce looked the picture of dejection. But the redhead was not to be denied. She braced and even smiled a little.

"It can't be as bad as you all think," she asserted. "The trial isn't over yet. Something will turn up."

The spectators had moved into the stuffy courtroom where the case of Eddie Briggs was about to be called. The trio of Eddie's best friends started after them.

CHAPTER XX

Judge Hartley, gray haired and stern looking in his black judicial robes, was preparing to make quick work of the case of the brawling sailor before him. The Judge was very jealous of the good name of San Francisco. He was especially harsh toward elements from the outside who created disturbances in his beloved city. He had long maintained that the town's public dance halls were hotbeds of crime and scandal. Here was a case where a visitor to the city had started a fight in a dance hall and almost killed another man. Moreover, the good name of a San Francisco girl had been bandied about by the brawlers. The Judge was particularly concerned over the sacredness of the good name of local young womanhood.

Eddie had a slim chance with him from the start.

Peachy had a hard time discovering a seat near the rear of the hot, crowded room. In the railed-off space in front of the Judge's bench sat officials of the court, witnesses, Eddie Briggs and Searchlight Doyle.

Eddie looked surly and resigned. He was unshaven and his curly hair was in disarray. His uniform showed the effect of having been slept in.

Searchlight slumped in a chair in front of the op-

posite side of the bench. His head was swathed in white bandages. Now and then he darted a hostile glance over toward his late rival. Eddie was seemingly unaware of his presence. Two shore patrol sailors, with side-arms swung from their khaki belts, stood near Eddie, ready to take him in charge if the Judge decided that the culprit was to be turned over to the Navy.

Lieutenant Girard and Al walked solemnly up and entered the enclosure, taking seats near Eddie. Al tried to engage his friend in low voiced conference, but Eddie impatiently waved him away.

The buzz of animated conversation in the courtroom died away as a clerk arose and, commanding silence, read the charge against Eddie.

The case was rushed rapidly.

The two police officers who had borne Eddie away from Gladland testified as to what they had encountered there. Jake Kiernan gave his version of the battle, again disclaiming all responsibility for it and hurting Eddie's chances by picturing him as a dangerous character who had been guilty of a similar offense three nights previous to his assault on Doyle. The one bright spot for Eddie thus far was when a doctor testified that Searchlight's wound, while painful, was, contrary to first belief, not serious.

Then the victim himself was called and shambled to the witness chair. He took the oath in a low, rasping voice and kept his head down as he testified. He did not want to look Eddie in the eye because he

knew in his heart that the story he was about to tell was not quite accurate. He had become engaged to a girl—to——

"You don't need to tell her name!" cut in the Judge sharply. "There is no use of involving her in this case."

Well, then, he had become engaged to this girl. He just left her for a few minutes and then he came back out to the park later and found Briggs trying to take her away from him. He spoke to Briggs about it. No, he didn't swear or anything, just made a gentlemanly protest. And Briggs, without any warning whatever, had knocked him down and must have kicked him or something after he fell because he had become immediately unconscious and had remained that way for over an hour. He knew nothing about the free-for-all fight that had raged as the result of Eddie's blow.

"Briggs is a dangerous man," asserted Searchlight stoutly. "He'll kill somebody some time. He goes crazy mad. He fights every time he gets ashore. I remember in Shanghai——"

"Stick to San Francisco, Doyle," commanded the Judge. "If that's all you've got to say about the present case, sit down."

Lieutenant Girard got up and begged His Honor's permission to say a few words. He declared in a quiet, convincing voice that from his own experience with Briggs the accused was not at all the type of man that Doyle described. He was a very clean-cut, intel-

ligent boy, a little exuberant and lively perhaps but certainly not a brawler or vicious by nature.

"I take it that you know this man only from contact with him aboard ship while he is under naval discipline, Lieutenant," said the Judge suavely. "It is not your custom to associate socially with your sailors ashore and observe their actions there."

Lieutenant Girard admitted that this was quite true.

"A man could be one thing while he was under constant observation on a ship and quite another when he was on his own responsibility ashore?" asked the Judge rhetorically.

The Lieutenant was forced to concede that this might be so.

"I do not believe that it holds good in the case of Briggs," he maintained. "He is a good boy."

"I fear you are prejudiced," declared the Judge wryly.

Lieutenant Girard resumed his seat with a little gesture of helplessness. He glanced over at Eddie sympathetically. The latter was seemingly hearing and seeing nothing. He was resigned to his fate.

"Briggs, have you anything to say before I sentence you?" asked the Judge.

Al had to nudge Eddie and repeat the Judge's question before the accused sailor comprehended. Then the prisoner merely looked up at the Judge and nodded in the negative. His action was so utterly indifferent, so apparently contemptuous of the court, that Judge Hartley bristled visibly.

A Paramount Picture. MARRIED IN HASTE. *The Kerr Inc.*

"Very well," said the Judge. "My sentence will give you an opportunity to think over some things that I am about to tell you."

At the repetition of the word "sentence" Eddie for the first time began to show some interest in the proceedings. The word had an ugly and ominous sound. He winced. He thought rapidly of his respectable father back in Reno. The old man would be all cut up. And Lieutenant Girard, too. He was a good guy, the Lieut. He had done his best for him. As for himself and Peachy and the rest of them, he was just as well satisfied to be going to jail. Only, gee, it was tough on a healthy, freedom-loving fellow to shut him up in a rotten jail. When he hadn't done anything that any red-blooded lad wouldn't have done in his place. Damn women anyway! They never did you any good. Only harm. Damn Peachy in particular! Pretending to love him and all the time preparing to become Doyle's girl. He wasn't sorry he had hit Searchlight. He'd take another crack at him as soon as he got a chance. What a joke, the law. Railroading him to jail when he had only socked a four-flushing roughneck on the jaw, a trouble-maker who had had it coming to him for a long time.

A sneer spread over Eddie Briggs' mouth at the Judge's next words. They sounded so much like a burlesque on the facts in the case.

"All women are entitled to respect," the Judge was saying in a very pompous and impressive voice, "whether they ride in limousines or earn a living in a

dance hall. Respectable women don't care to have rowdies starting brawls over them and half killing each other. That sort of thing went out with the cave man. This is twentieth century San Francisco. We are proud of our city and of the good name of its young womanhood. We do not care to see headlines such as blazed from the front pages of our newspapers this morning. We will not allow visitors to our city to injure its reputation by disturbing the peace and committing assaults.

"Fortunately the victim of the assault is on the road to recovery. It might just as well have turned out more tragically. Not that I hold the plaintiff in this case altogether blameless. His offense against San Francisco womanhood was probably as great as that of the accused. I would, if I could, sentence both of you. Disorder and assault must be punished severely. It leads to more serious offenses. It is often the prelude to murder. Edward Briggs, stand up!"

Eddie rose slowly to his feet and faced the Judge calmly. The latter's sonorous warning had seemingly not touched him in the least.

The Judge started. "Edward Briggs, I sentence you to——"

"Stop!"

A woman's cry that was almost a scream startled the courtroom. The Judge looked out sternly, his hand on his gavel to pound for order. Spectators stood and craned their necks to get a view of the interrupter. Two reporters, a man and a woman, sprang

frankly to their feet and stared eagerly. The trial had annoyed the ladies and gentlemen of the press by threatening to turn into a cut and dried affair. Now they, like the less professional spectators, were about to receive their promised sensation, their story.

They were in luck! The girl who had screamed at the Judge was young, pretty, dressed in extreme flapper style. Rouged lips and cheeks. Abbreviated skirts. Silken knees. And, to make the story perfect, red headed.

The Judge's warning to Eddie had caused an idea to leap into Peachy's wrought-up and active brain. "Respectable women don't care to have rowdies starting brawls over them," that cruel old man had shot from his tight jaw and thin lips at the man she loved. Well, what if the women weren't respectable? What if the Judge were disillusioned concerning his ideal of "the good name of our young womanhood"? Even if it involved a little white lying. Wouldn't that excuse——

Peachy had waited until the last minute when there was no doubt but what a severe sentence would be inflicted upon Eddie. She had wanted to be very sure. She would not deliberately smirch herself if it were not absolutely necessary.

The suddenness of Judge Hartley's "Edward Briggs, I sentence you to——" caught her off her guard. It slashed her like a knife. She leaped up and almost screamed. But she quickly recovered. She remembered the rôle she was to force herself to play.

She started deliberately to act the part. She slouched. She forced a supercilious, defiant smile to her lips. Her eyes half closed, she swept the courtroom with a look of sophisticated contempt. Then she started to walk down the main aisle of the room with a hard-boiled swagger. The hand-bag dangled from her jeweled wrist. The white fur was slung rakishly over one slim shoulder. The high heels of her red shoes tapped on the bare floor. Silken legs twinkled.

Voices talking into an undertone buzzed through the room. The Judge pounded for order.

"She looks like a professional headline grabber," whispered one reporter to a fellow in the same craft. "Some hot baby! Who is she?"

Peachy had reached the railing separating the ordinary spectators from the press and the court attendants. The Judge leaned down and spoke to one of the latter. He hastened to the intruder and brusquely ordered her to go back whence she had come or be ejected from the room. She waved him aside. Judge Hartley stared at her sternly from behind his pince-nez glasses.

"Young woman," he commanded, "what is the meaning of this?"

She smiled up at him calmly, one hand on her right hip.

"I'm a witness," she drawled huskily. "You've got a process-server out after me but I beat him to it. I wouldn't miss this show for the world. You didn't call me, so I've volunteered."

"What is your name?"

"Peachy Deane."

"And your connection with this case."

"I'm the woman who caused this fight." Then fearing that her roughshod tactics would ruin her object, she asked in a softer tone of voice, "May I take the witness chair, Your Honor?"

Noisy comment like the swarming of bees burst out again from the spectators. Judge Hartley angrily pounded for order.

"The room will remain quiet!" he roared. "Otherwise attendants will clear the court."

The noise subsided. He gazed at Peachy for a moment, studying her, then silently motioned her to take the chair.

She had to pass Eddie Briggs on the way. She glanced furtively at him. He was regarding her with mingled wonderment and surprise. He didn't get her at all. Had she come there to wield the final blow of the ax upon his neck? Was she about to taunt him publicly, to make him a laughing stock as well as a jailbird? His face was rigid. He looked at her grimly, daring her to do her worst.

From the other side of the room Searchlight was worried and uneasy. He did not relish the revelations which Peachy might offer. With a wry expression, he sank lower into his chair, his chin on his chest.

With a defiant swaying of her slim, lightly clad body, she mounted the two steps to the witness chair. Her eyes had a bored expression as she laid her right

hand on the Bible held up by an attendant and swore to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. She silently prayed for forgiveness, because what she was about to say had nothing of the truth in it. She sank down into the chair and crossed her silken legs, exposing a generous portion of well formed calf.

The shutters of two cameras clicked. The Judge rapped his gavel at once and ordered the photographers out of the room. They left with hang-dog expressions but still in possession of their precious front page plates. The red head glanced at the Judge with an expression that demanded to know why he was so fussy. Reporters were racing their pencils over their copy paper. Messengers darted out of the room to telephone composing rooms to stop the press, that a sensation was coming.

"Now, young woman," said the Judge at last. "You may tell your story."

For a second a fleeting worried frown waved over Peachy's face. She summoned all her courage. She shot an appealing glance at Eddie, asking him silently not to judge her too harshly. But his face showed only disgust. He took his eyes from her and riveted them upon his hands. If he could, he would have closed his ears to her voice. Peachy resumed her cold, tough exterior like a mask. She threw a coy glance at the Judge, who bristled.

She indicated Eddie and Doyle by jerky nods.

"All I wanted to say," she started in a husky voice,

"is that you shouldn't judge these two eggs too harshly. I played the two of them against each other for a couple of saps. I made each of them believe I was his only—only——"

She gulped and caught her hand to her throat. For a second she thought she couldn't possibly go through with it.

"Go on, young woman," ordered the Judge with an expression that was almost incredulity. "We're beginning to get to the bottom of this thing."

"Well, you see, Judge," continued the witness throwing His Honor a smile, "I met this Briggs fellow and tossed him the glad eye. He fell and I gave him to understand he was my one and only. But Doyle had a swell ring and I wanted it. So I handed him the same line, thinking that Briggs was safe aboard his ship. But last night Briggs showed up unexpectedly—and—well, I had to keep up the gag. Doyle came upon us in a loving pose, and naturally there was a battle. Briggs was seeing red. You couldn't blame him. He hit the other fellow. It wouldn't have hurt him much but by accident Doyle's head hit the iron railing of a park bench and he was knocked silly. The other sailors piled on and—well, that's that."

The Judge was regarding her with fascinated eyes. She was a new type to him. He had never before had a species of the hard-boiled, gold digging modern girl before him. He had always maintained that such girls did not exist, that they were figments of fiction

writers' imaginations. He divided all women into two classes—good women and professional bad women. Now he was being disillusioned. His previous talk about the sacredness of young womanhood rang hollowly in his ears. Why, this girl was the real guilty one in this case! These two young sailors were merely catspaws. They had loved and fought at her command. She was a modern Medici, a Cleopatra with red bobbed hair.

"Is it your custom to treat men in this way, to play one against the other for your own purposes?" he asked.

"Sure," replied Peachy with a toss of her red hair. "I get all I can out of them all. They're all suckers and——"

She stopped suddenly as a commotion swept the rear of the room. A gray haired woman had pushed into the court in spite of the efforts of a burly attendant to stop her. She stood, frightened but determined, against the wall in the back of the room. She was looking for somebody. An agonized look clouded the face of the girl in the witness chair. She lowered her head, as if hoping to miss the roving eyes of the newcomer. Judge Hartley pounded for order and eventually got it.

"Repeat what you were saying," he ordered. "I couldn't hear it for the noise."

There was a suspicion of tears in Peachy's eyes as she raised her face bravely.

"I said—I played men for suckers," she choked. "I get all——"

Mrs. Deane broke from the detaining hands of the attendant who caught at her as she rushed toward the aisle. The elderly woman reached the railing before the Judge's bench. Her face was blanched, lips quivering. The room was in an uproar. Spectators and reporters were on their feet. Some even stood on chairs for better vantage points.

Judge Hartley almost split his gavel. Bailiffs rushed around, pushing people into their chairs. Finally a semblance of order was won. Mrs. Deane had had time somewhat to recover her composure.

"I don't know what my daughter is doing here," she said pleadingly to the Judge. "I can't understand why she has said what you have just heard. It isn't true, a word of it."

It was the ultimate cross for Peachy. But she must bear it. She couldn't retract now. She must take a chance of making her mother understand later. She forced a cruel, cynical smile to her face.

"Mother, you don't know the truth!" she almost shouted.

Mrs. Deane's fragile body slumped. She looked at her daughter, speechless. In a rush the girl resolved to take the whole plunge. She spoke with impatience, anger and heartlessness, hoping to finish quickly.

She fiercely indicated her dress, her bag, her fur and her hat.

"Where do you suppose I got all this stuff?" she flung out. "I couldn't buy it with what I make behind a department store counter, could I? I don't work in a dance hall for nothing, do I? Where do you suppose any pretty girl today who isn't rich gets her finery? From men, of course. And most men aren't giving anything away."

Mrs. Deane cringed as if struck by a blow. Eddie Briggs' face was clouded with anger. What a girl! What a fool he had been for believing for a moment that she was sincere. And she had had the nerve to come and tell him that sob story that she loved him not two hours ago. She was worse than a gold digger. And coming in now and spilling everything, probably just for the cheap notoriety, the newspaper headlines, that it would get her.

A sympathetic attendant pushed a chair behind Mrs. Deane and she sank into it, covering her face with her hands and sobbing. Peachy forced herself to look away from her mother.

The red headed girl turned pleadingly toward the Judge, hoping he would not make her continue to tear her heart out. It was becoming more than she could stand, steeled as she was to the ordeal.

Judge Hartley, sick and disgusted, glared at her.

"This is awful, unspeakable," his voice crackled. "I did not believe such girls as you existed. Society should be rid of such characters." His eyes swept to a group of three obviously bad women caught in a

raid the previous night and now sitting on a bench on the side of the room awaiting trial. He pointed to them and threatened Peachy. "I am going to put you under surveillance, young woman, and if you're ever brought before me again, you'll receive the same punishment as those women."

The witness inwardly winced. But her face still bore its stolid expression. Judge Hartley pounded his desk irately.

"I should really give you a prison sentence. I am sorry the law does not cover cases such as yours. You are excused!"

She was only partially relieved. What was going to happen to Eddie? She looked questioningly at the Judge. He ignored her. He had turned to the prisoner before him.

"In the face of this amazing testimony," he said in clipped, angry sentences, "I cannot in all justice sentence the accused as I had first intended. I see now, Briggs, that you were not primarily to blame. You were a victim, as was also the plaintiff. I censured you for smirching young womanhood; this young woman had already smirched herself beyond the power of any man to harm her. I had not completed sentencing you. This being your first offense, Briggs, I now dismiss your case with the warning to be more careful in your female associates in the future."

He banged out a resounding whack with his gavel. He arose and, turning abruptly, disappeared from the

courtroom by a rear door, slamming it after him. Judge Hartley's pet illusion about women had been shattered. It made him very angry.

A hub-bub of animated comment filled the room. The spectators seemed loath to leave. They discussed the sensational features of the case among themselves. They stared at Peachy. Attendants had to fairly push them from the room.

Peachy, huddled in the witness chair, was hiding weeping eyes in her arms.

CHAPTER XXI

Mary Deane also remained in her seat, head bowed, weeping softly. The world had crashed abruptly around her and it was more than she could bear. Lucy, her baby, her daughter who had always been so good to her, so sure of herself, so seemingly innocent and pure, had publicly branded herself a bad girl. And a very vicious type of bad girl at that. Lucy was all that her mother lived for. Now Lucy, the Lucy that she knew, was gone. In her place had stepped a bold, heartless, painted creature without reputation and without shame. Mrs. Deane was uprooted, dazed. She did not want to look at this new Lucy. She could, she must, carry only in her heart the image of the daughter that was.

With difficulty she forced herself falteringly to her feet and staggered down the aisle toward the rear of the courtroom.

When Peachy finally raised her tousled head, her mother had progressed half way to the door. Peachy could not believe her eyes. Her mother, her own mother, all she had in the world, was leaving her, deserting her, without as much as a word. It was too cruel. Her mother *must* understand.

She stumbled down the steps from the witness stand and ran down the aisle after the elderly woman. Mrs. Deane had opened the door and disappeared out into the corridor. She was walking slowly toward the outer door, her head lowered, her lips twitching. Peachy caught up with her and placed her hands upon her mother's shoulders. She slipped around in front of her.

"Mother," she said softly.

Mrs. Deane refused to raise her eyes, to look at her. The girl placed one hand gently under her mother's chin and forced the latter to acknowledge her presence.

"I don't expect you to understand at first, mother dear," said Peachy gravely. "It was all so terrible. But I love Eddie and I had to do all I could to save him. He's a good boy of a respectable family. A jail sentence would ruin him. And he would have missed the fleet and been court martialed besides. He wasn't guilty, but he couldn't and wouldn't prove his innocence. I was the only one who could help him. I had to take the blame, get up there and tell that story. It will be in the newspapers, of course. It will hurt for a while. But it will blow over. They'll soon forget all about who Peachy Deane was. It won't affect you and me. And I can get another job somewhere."

A bright light was breaking through the tears in Mrs. Deane's eyes.

"Then it wasn't true—that awful story you told up there. You aren't really bad?" she faltered.

The girl looked utterly miserable.

"Mother dear," she pleaded. "You didn't really believe that for a moment, did you?"

"If anybody else had said it, I would have had them arrested," said Mrs. Deane. "But you have always told the truth, Lucy. I was afraid you were telling it up there on the witness stand. It broke my heart."

Peachy patted her arm consolingly.

"I'm sorry, mother. It *was* awful. If I had it to do over again, I never would attempt it. It was many times worse than I imagined. But you *do* believe it was all a pack of lies to save Eddie, don't you?"

Mrs. Deane actually smiled. She stroked the girl's tear-stained cheek and kissed her.

"Yes, I believe you now," she replied, to Peachy's infinite relief. "You're *my* Lucy, after all." She added thoughtfully, "You must love this man very much to go through a thing like that for him, to wreck your own reputation publicly. Is he worthy of you? Does *he* love *you?*"

Peachy bowed her head. She looked at her mother with a calm sadness in her face.

"No, he doesn't," she admitted. "He hates me. If he had any spark of love for me left, I guess I killed it with what I said in there. You will believe I wasn't telling the truth, mother, but he never will."

Mrs. Deane gathered the miserable girl into her arms like a baby.

"Don't worry," she consoled softly. "There are plenty of other men. Men more worthy of a sacrifice such as you made."

"There'll — never — be — another — man — for — me," came Peachy's muffled voice, punctuated with sobs. She lifted her head and faced her mother bravely. "I've been an awful fool, mother. I *did* take presents from men. I didn't give anything in return, but I *did* play them for suckers as I told the Judge. All the girls at the dance hall do the same thing. It's dead wrong. It has lost me the love of the only man in the world for me. He hates me. And I deserve it!"

She buried her face again and started to cry.

A finger tapped her shoulder lightly. The tap was repeated three times before the girl became aware of it. Mrs. Deane was staring with mingled emotions. Peachy raised her face and looked around.

Confronting her was—Eddie.

A grave, understanding Eddie. An Eddie whose lips at last were not curled in scorn. An Eddie whose face promised to bring back a Paradise which she had long believed lost.

"I heard all you said to your mother," he said gravely. "I was passing and I stopped. I thought I was entitled to hear."

She regarded him questioningly through tear-

dimmed eyes. Both of them seemed at a loss for words.

"Well—" she tried to speak.

"I believe you too, Peachy," he said. "You got up there and told all those lies for me. You're a good girl, the best in the world. I can forget Searchlight's ring. I know you meant no harm with that. I won't even question you about it."

"You mean you——"

"I love you, Peachy!" he cried from his heart. "I've always loved you. I loved you from the time I first saw you down there by the wharf, I guesss, although I didn't know it at the time. You see, I haven't had much experience with love. After I got you wrong that night out at your house, I felt rotten and I kicked myself all over the lot until I saw you again last night at Gladland. I was tickled to death when I found out you had forgiven me and that you still loved me. That's why I took it so hard when Doyle blew in and I saw his ring and—but that's all over now. We love each other. That's enough."

He held out his arms for her but she eluded him for the moment. She wanted him to get everything straight. She was determined there would be no misunderstandings this time.

"It was silly of me to take the ring," she began determinedly. "It didn't——"

"Don't let's talk about it. I said I wouldn't ask you and——"

"But you're entitled to know, Eddie. I'll tell you the truth. I didn't like Searchlight especially. I was heartbroken last night and I thought I hated you for what happened at my house that first time we were together. I was angry and I wanted to get square with you some way. I thought I could hurt you most by taking his ring. It didn't mean anything to me. I wasn't his girl or anything. How could I be when all the time I was in love with you, though I wouldn't admit it to myself?"

"You poor kid," sympathized Eddie. "I treated you fierce."

"I couldn't blame you. Some of the things I did were awfully silly." She eyed him anxiously. "But you understand everything now, Eddie? And you forgive me for everything?"

"Sure," he cried. "I love you. I want to marry you, dear."

"Oh, Eddie!"

She flung herself into his arms. Then and there the spectators at Eddie's trial missed the climactic scene of the day. For the leading man and woman in the case were locked in a very tight and warm embrace right there in the dingy corridor of the jail building and were unmistakably exchanging very ardent kisses of forgiveness and undying love. Mrs. Deane, smiling happily at first, at last glanced around anxiously and felt a little embarrassed for them. Especially since her daughter's young man had thus far seemed up to that point unaware of her presence.

Finally the two young people stood apart, smiling happily at each other. Simultaneously Eddie became aware that Peachy had a companion. His face reddened a little.

"Gee, I didn't see you, Mrs. Deane," he apologized. "I hope you don't hold anything against me. I treated Peachy wrong, but it was all a mistake. I love her, Mrs. Deane. You won't kick if we get married, will you?"

"I only want to see her happy," said Mrs. Deane. Eddie took heart at her friendly expression.

"I'll be happy with Eddie, mother," Peachy assured her. She had one arm tucked snugly under Eddie's stalwart right bicep.

"I don't know how you're going to support a wife on a sailor's pay," commented the practical-minded Mrs. Deane. "It isn't much. I know. I married a sailor."

"I thought your husband was a warrant officer," Eddie slyly recalled.

"Well, he was a sailor when I married him," insisted the elderly woman.

"Let's not talk about money now," the girl pouted. "Eddie hasn't much time. He's sailing soon."

"I'll be out of the Navy in six months anyway," Eddie reassured his prospective mother-in-law. "I can get a good job. My father will take me into the hotel business if I want to go. Even if I stayed in the service, I could probably get a commission. Lieutenant Girard was going to fix it for me." He added

this last sentence with a touch of his old cockiness.

The long, loud blast of a siren suddenly sounded from the direction of the Bay. All three looked around, startled. Peachy and her mother mutely asked Eddie what it meant.

"That's the flagship calling," he explained. "We sail in an hour. We got to hurry, if we're going to get married."

"You can get a license right here," suggested Peachy's mother.

Now that the young people were bent upon taking the plunge she was reconciled to it and resolved to help them all she could.

"That's great," cried Eddie, patting Mrs. Deane on her arm. She was a good sort after all. He knew he could warm up to her after he knew her a little better. He added, "Come on!"

Grasping Peachy by the arm, he hurried down the corridor with her, scanning the doors of the various offices eagerly.

He caught an attendant by the arm and asked breathlessly, "Say, where can a fellow get a marriage license in a hurry?"

"Third door to the right."

They swung into a stuffy little room where five or six couples of various nationalities were already lined up at the window behind which a tall, very deliberate young man was telling them where to sign and pay their dollar. To his dismay Eddie saw that in the ordinary course of events it would be several minutes

before their turn in line would be reached. A jovial, middle-aged fat man with a very blonde and much younger fat girl by his side saved the day. From his position at the very head of the string of prospective newlyweds he noticed the bluejacket's agitation over the delay.

"Come on, sailor, grab my place!" he sang out. "You haven't much time. I can wait!"

"Thanks, you're a good scout," cried Eddie. Peachy smiled her gratitude and the fat man silently contrasted her fresh glowing beauty with his own double-chinned fiancée.

They told their names hurriedly to the bored clerk. He filled out the license and showed them where to sign.

"One dollar, please," he droned.

Eddie fished it from his blouse and they hurried out into the corridor again.

"Now we got to find a preacher quick!" worried Eddie. He turned toward Peachy and her mother for a suggestion.

"You can get married here too," said the latter imperturbably. "Any magistrate can do it. This building is full of them."

They walked searchingly up the corridor, peering at the names printed on the frosted glass of the offices.

"Would a judge do?" asked Eddie.

Mrs. Deane nodded.

The sailor pointed to a nearby door. He flung it open and pulled Peachy in after him.

CHAPTER XXII

Judge Stephen Hartley had not recovered from the temper wrought up within his usually orderly mind by the red headed girl witness' revelations on the stand when he returned to his office after his session on the bench.

Mead, the young lawyer who served as his assistant and who had listened to the trial, followed his superior into the sanctum. Mead was secretly amused at the surprise and chagrin with which the Judge had heard the girl topple the temple of ideal young womanhood to the ground. Experienced as he was with all type of culprits of both sexes through his contact with them in the courtroom, Judge Hartley had maintained a surprising innocence regarding the rather common type of modern young woman who is neither bad nor good. His arbitrary division of female morals into black and white and his tendency to discourse upon this at great length upon every opportunity had always rather annoyed Mead, who was a man of the world of the younger generation.

The assistant had rather wished he did not have to return to the office with his chief. He knew that he was in for a lecture. He was not mistaken.

"Did you ever hear such scandalous words come from the lips of a technically respectable woman before?" demanded the Judge irascibly, removing his spectacles and his official robes and seating himself before his desk. "I confess it, I do not understand that type of woman at all. In a way she is more dangerous and blameworthy than a girl of the streets. The latter, at least, makes no claim to goodness. No man's son is safe with women of the type of this Peachy Deane at large."

"Perhaps you're too hard on her, Judge," suggested young Mead mildly, blowing smoke from his cigarette idly into the air. "She's a pretty numerous modern type. Pretty, attractively dressed, wise in how to sell her charms. Men give her presents, but they get their money's worth from her. Usually that kind of girl dances well, talks well, is good company. Perhaps she pets a little, but seldom goes further. She's too smart. She knows that some day she'll want to marry and she keeps herself straight for the man she'll eventually love. When she finally settles down, she makes a good wife usually."

"How can she?" snapped the Judge.

"Because she's had her fling. She knows men and she goes into marriage with her eyes open. Not with the vague, half frightened hope of a Paradise with which your old fashioned innocent darling gets hooked up, only to bump against stern reality later and cry to be unhooked again. I'll venture to say that fewer divorces result from the marriages of the Peachy

Deanes of the world than come out of unions where the bride prides herself upon her pre-nuptial innocence. It's better for a girl to find out about other men before she gets married than afterward. It makes for less trouble."

"That's an immoral attitude, Mead," the Judge reproved.

"It's a practical one, at least," maintained the nonchalant young man.

"You don't suppose that young sailor out there will want to have anything to do with that girl after what she told on the stand, do you?" asked Hartley triumphantly.

"He may, if he's wise," declared the amazing Mead. "I studied that girl while she was talking. I don't claim to be a detective or a psychologist, sir, but I got the impression that down underneath she was a pure, innocent girl."

"What! After the account she gave of herself?"

"Lies! If you'll pardon me for saying so, sir, she played a game with you. She invented her story because she wanted to shift your censure of young Briggs to herself. She deliberately blackened her own character so that he would seem to have an excuse for his actions. And she succeeded admirably. You stormed at her and you dismissed the prisoner. Of course she was in love with the sailor all the time—that's the tragedy of it. He'll probably turn against her. Unless he's smarter than I give him credit for. Unless

he saw through her plan or deliberately framed it with her."

"Nonsense!" scowled the Judge. "You read too many tabloid newspapers and modern novels, Mead. You might better confine yourself to the law journals."

"Sometimes the law is too dogmatic about things," suggested the youthful lawyer earnestly. "The standards of right and wrong are not as fixed today as they used to be. Every good woman isn't sitting home darning socks, and sometimes the sock-darners aren't so good either."

Judge Hartley snorted. He bit the end from a black cigar rather savagely and started rustling papers on his desk. Mead obediently walked over and sat down at a smaller desk in the corner of the room and opened a brief case.

Both men looked up with a start as the door burst open and Eddie and Peachy, followed at a more sedate pace by Mrs. Deane, fairly catapulted into the room. A blank look swept over Eddie's face as he recognized the Judge into whose office they had blundered. But there was no time to rectify his mistake. He determined to risk it.

"Judge, will you marry us?" he pleaded.

Judge Hartley's mouth gaped open until his freshly lighted cigar almost fell from between his thin lips. Mead, from his desk in the corner, almost laughed aloud. Eddie's request seemed to the elderly man an insult, an insolent joke. Peachy glided around the

Judge's desk and, standing very close to him, smiled contritely and appealingly.

"I'm not really as bad as you think I am, Judge, or as black as I painted myself on the stand," she pleaded. "It was all a misunderstanding. We love each other. We want to get married before Eddie's ship sails. It leaves in forty minutes. We wouldn't have bothered you, only we thought you might like to know the truth about us and then marry us. It'll be a satisfaction to you later."

Eddie was regarding the Judge anxiously, fiddling with his white hat which he held in his nervous fingers. The Judge looked over toward Mrs. Deane, hoping to recognize an ally in his reluctance to perform this amazing act.

"But—this lady here is your mother, is she not, young woman?" he demanded. "Surely she doesn't countenance this marriage."

Mrs. Deane stepped forward.

"I don't blame you for being vexed, Judge," she said. "I was heartbroken when I listened to my daughter in court. But she has explained everything. She is really the good girl I have always known her to be. She said all those things on the witness stand because she was in love with this young man and she wanted to save him from punishment. She shouldn't have done it, but she meant well. Both of them have gone through a great deal. I feel that they deserve their happiness."

Judge Hartley was a kind-hearted if rather bigoted

and positive man. He glanced sharply over at Mead. He did not wish to appear inconsistent in the hearing of his young colleague. The latter was apparently busily engaged in studying a lengthy brief in the case of the city versus the local gas company. The Judge could not see the amused and I-told-you-so smile which played around the young man's lips. It was just as well.

The Judge made one more statement in the interests of law and order. He couched his words in such a stern voice that the three people in front of him were temporarily filled with genuine alarm.

"By your own lips just now, young woman," pronounced the Judge, "you have convicted yourself of perjury! You swore under oath there on the stand to tell the truth. I could punish you severely."

But a moment later he extracted the sting from his words and caused a smile of relief to replace the chagrin on Peachy's face by adding, "But there are times when justice is perhaps best served by a slight deviation from the truth."

Unfortunately young Mead had now disappeared into an inner office and was not present to hear this shockingly unconventional statement from Judge Hartley.

The Judge was studying Peachy intently. He had never met this modern type of middle class young woman before. She interested him strangely. So young, so vivacious, so beautiful and so brave. He found himself, almost against his will, approving of her heartily.

"I will marry you gladly," he finally said. "But we must have another witness. Mead?" He turned around and discovered that his assistant had left.

"I'll get somebody outside," cut in Eddie quickly. He wanted nothing to postpone the ceremony further. He was afraid the Judge would change his mind.

Eddie bounded out into the corridor and cast a hurried look up and down. He ran to the main entrance of the building. There a sight met his eye which caused him to grin broadly. Searchlight Doyle was submitting himself to the tender mercies of three newspaper photographers. Chest out, only one eye showing from beneath his heavy head covering of bandages, arms folded, Searchlight looked as if he were about to be presented with the Congressional Medal of Honor. Three camera shutters clicked. Doyle was immortalized on the front pages of the San Francisco newspapers.

"Say, big boy," said Eddie, standing spread-legged in front of his rival, "the Judge wants to see you."

"What for?" demanded Doyle, whitening in spite of himself.

"Never mind, come along," commanded Eddie and seized his late antagonist by the arm. Searchlight was not unmindful of the condition in which his last encounter with the California's signalman had left him. He submitted with only a muttered protest. As for Eddie, he took a sardonic pleasure in drafting Doyle to act as a witness at his wedding to Peachy. It would leave no doubts in his rival's mind as to the outcome of

their contest for the pretty redhead's hand. Also there was in the back of the would-be bridegroom's head a sincere desire to make friends with his erstwhile enemy. The latter wasn't really a bad skate, with men, and Eddie wanted to be on good terms with everybody on this happy occasion.

"Hurry up. We're sailing soon," urged Eddie and hustled down the corridor with the still unconvinced Doyle. The newspaper cameramen whom the late victim of Briggs' fists had been regaling with a wholly erroneous account of the battle, a version in which Searchlight had figured as a Jack Dempsey felled unawares by a foul blow, were changing the plates in their machines as the prospective subject of their labors made his almost forced departure. They did not for the time being notice that he had fled.

Eddie fairly propelled his prey into Judge Hartley's office. The newcomer blinked as he noted Peachy's presence and that of the elderly woman, whom he did not know.

"What do you want with me?" he sulkily asked the Judge.

"I presumed Briggs had told you," said Hartley in some surprise. "We need you as a witness at the marriage of this young man and young lady."

Doyle glared at Eddie for his trick. Peachy smiled broadly, enjoying the joke and the nonplussed attitude of her late admirer.

"Nothin' doin'," declared the latter emphatically.

Eddie seized his arm rather forcibly.

"Oh, come on, Searchlight, be a sport," he urged. "I licked you in the fight and I licked you for the girl. Admit it and let's be friends. You can't stop us from getting married. Show you're a man and give us a break. What do you say?"

Searchlight blinked uncertainly. He saw that the jig was up. Rather sheepishly he held out his hand to Eddie. The latter took it in a firm grip.

"Let's forget the scrap, hey, Searchlight?" grinned Eddie. "I won't cramp your style with the dames any more. I'll be a married man."

"That's right," agreed Doyle. "I'll be a witness. What do I have to do?"

Judge Hartley hastily explained that his sole duty was to stand by and then sign the marriage certificate. The Judge fished a small book out of his desk. He bade the young couple stand before him. He rushed through a short version of the marriage service. When he came to the section about the ring, Eddie, to everybody's surprise, produced a small golden circlet and slipped it on Peachy's finger.

"It's beautiful," she enthused.

"I bought this last night as soon as I came ashore before I met you," he explained in a whisper to the happy girl. "I thought for a while I wasn't going to use it, though."

"—and I pronounce Lucy Deane and Edward Briggs man and wife," intoned the Judge sonorously.

Mrs. Deane wept a little. Eddie kissed the bride and her mother.

"If I may," nodded the Judge to Eddie, clearing his throat, and imprinted a surprisingly strenuous kiss upon Peachy's red lips.

She looked encouragingly toward Searchlight. Rather shame-facedly he approached and kissed her also, with an apprehensive glance at her husband. Once the kiss was successfully accomplished, he felt rather chesty about it. At least he had kissed her. Eddie couldn't take that away from him.

The resounding blast of a siren sounded as if it were in the room.

"Gee, I gotta go!" cried Doyle. "You too, Eddie!"

The former darted from the room.

"You won't be late, will you, Eddie?" the new bride asked anxiously. Eddie was engaged in handing Judge Hartley a five dollar bill.

"No, I can make it," Eddie assured her. "But we'll have to hurry."

"I want to apologize to you both for the harsh things I said to you in court," announced the Judge. "Evidently I misjudged you, though appearances, you will admit, were against you. I wish you all the happiness in the world, and I'm quite sure you're going to experience it."

He shook hands with them all, including Mrs. Deane. He had just barely time to step aside as three newspaper photographers, the same trio who had been stalking Searchlight, rushed into the room, in search of more pictures.

"What's going on? Wedding?" cried the first one. "That's great!"

Eddie looked at them with dismay.

"There's no time for pictures," he protested. "I got to get back to my ship. She's sailing in half an hour."

"Just one shot apiece," pleaded a photographer. "This story is too good to miss."

Finally they had to yield.

"Kiss the bride, Briggs," ordered a cameraman. "That shouldn't be hard."

Eddie obeyed. Shutters clicked.

"Stand in front of them, Judge, like you were marrying them," commanded another lens hound.

Judge Hartley obeyed, under protest. Three more plates were exposed.

"Now a group shot with everybody in it," cajoled the third Graflex chauffeur.

They were forced to submit to this also, with Mrs. Deane on one side of the newly-weds and Judge Hartley on the other.

"It's different from the first time we had our picture taken together, isn't it?" Peachy said roguishly to Eddie in an undertone.

He had the grace to blush despite his impatience to be away.

"That's all, folks. Thanks," sang out the photographers and disappeared on the run for their offices as quickly as they had come.

"Gee, I sure got to dash now," said Eddie when the intruders had gone. "If I miss the fleet, it's court

A Paramount Picture.

"GOOD BYE, EDDIE. I'LL BE WAITING FOR YOU."

The Final's In

martial for me and double duty the rest of my life."

"I'll go with you, of course," offered Peachy.

"You sure will," agreed Eddie.

"I'll have to say good bye here," said Mrs. Deane. She put her arms around her new son-in-law and kissed him heartily. "You'll be good to my little girl, I know. I feel that I've known you for years."

"Me too," said Eddie. "You'll have to take care of her until I get back, mother. I know you'll do a good job of it."

"I always have," declared Mrs. Deane.

"Good bye and good luck," called the Judge after them.

The two young newlyweds rushed from the room as another booming warning roared from the giant whistle of the U.S.S. California.

CHAPTER XXIII

1

Peachy and Eddie dashed from the court building arm and arm. Reaching the sidewalk they turned at a brisk pace and made down the steep hill toward Market Street. Neither said anything for several minutes.

Eddie was thinking hard. Gee, it was tough. Just as he had finally won her after such a physical and mental struggle, he was about to lose her. He looked at her with pride and heartache. What a swell looking wife, and such a good scout too. How he loved her! How was he ever going to get up the nerve to say good-bye to her for six months. The fleet was bound for Hawaii, he knew, and there would be a voyage clear around to New York before they finally cast anchor in San Pedro or San Francisco harbor. Happiness was still an eternity away. Unless——

Almost unconsciously he began to lag behind. She regarded him anxiously and pulled his arm.

"What's the matter, Eddie, losing your pep?" she chided. "We'll have to hurry."

"Don't worry," he almost sulked. "There's plenty

of time. You are not anxious to get rid of me, are you?"

"Oh, Eddie," she looked at him with such a pained expression that he put his arm around her and squeezed her right there on the crowded sidewalk.

"What a hell of a honeymoon we're going to have," he sighed.

"We can't help it, Eddie," she consoled, panting a little from the exertion of walking so fast.

"Six months is a lifetime."

"It's pretty long," she agreed. "How'll we ever stand it?"

He stood stock still. His face was white and tense.

"We're not going to stand it," he said defiantly. "I went through fire and water and so did you. Now we're entitled to a break."

"What do you mean, Eddie?" inquired Peachy in alarm. His set jaw and white face frightened her.

"I'm not going back," he asserted stubbornly. "They can't take you away from me."

"You're going to desert?"

"Well—I won't make the ship, that's all."

She stood stock still and faced him, hands on her hips. She raked him up and down with fire in her eyes. Her feelings were as lacerated as his at the thought of their parting. But she had kept a sense of values clearly in her head. No temporary hardship could lessen the joy of the fact that he loved her, that he was her husband, come what might.

"If you think that, after what I've gone through,

I'm going to have a deserter for a husband, you've got me dead wrong, Eddie Briggs," she hurled at him. "What's more, it's silly to try and walk to the wharf. We'll take a taxi."

He stood facing her sullenly. The seriousness of the offence he contemplated—desertion—worst of all crimes on the Navy's catalog, had been swallowed up for him in the terrible prospect of parting from her so soon after he had won her for his own. He knew the deadly dullness of peace-time routine on a naval vessel—the long days of semi-idleness, the interminable nights, every minute with the image before him of the one girl in the world, so near and yet so far. He could not stand it, he thought. It would be too maddening.

She had hailed a taxi cab. With a screeching of brakes, it whirled up to the curb. Peachy swung open the door.

"Get in, Eddie," she ordered.

"Not me," he said.

"Don't be a fool," she snapped.

She leaped into the cab and pulled him into its tonneau after her, almost throwing him into her lap. Eddie, regaining his bearings, leaned toward the half-asleep driver.

"Drive to Golden Gate Park," he directed.

The girl abruptly jerked him back into the seat. Her lips were very close to the driver's ears.

"Howard Street Wharf, and go as fast as this car will take you!" she yelled.

The driver turned around impatiently and asked plaintively, "Well—which is it? Make up your minds."

"Golden Gate Park!" shouted Eddie.

"Howard Street Wharf!" shouted Peachy. "Listen, this man has to make the fleet before it sails or he's a deserter. Hurry! You can hear the sirens blowing now!"

"Guess you win, lady," announced the chauffeur. "Don't blame him for wanting to stick around, but desertion's silly. I used to be in the Navy myself."

He shot the car into gear and, with a roar of his exhaust, darted into the traffic at a fast clip.

With an angry exclamation Eddie reached for the door as if to leap out and drag his new wife with him. She clung to his arm with a death grip.

"Don't be crazy, Eddie!" she panted. "We'll both be killed if you try that."

"I'm crazy about *you*, Peachy," he looked at her with an agonized expression. "Gee, I can't leave you now. I just can't. It isn't fair."

She took his head into her arms and comforted him upon her breast. She ran loving fingers through his tousled blond hair. She lifted his chin and kissed his lips passionately.

"We aren't children, Eddie," she argued. "Being separated won't kill us. It will be tough. But we're married now. Think of when we get together again! We'll make up for it all!"

He continued mumbling, still unconvinced that the cab wasn't racing him away from Paradise.

Market Street was cluttered tightly with traffic. Trolley cars lined all four tracks. Automobiles and trucks filled the space that was left from curb to curb. Their taxi driver performed miracles of ducking and dodging. But traffic policemen seemed to conspire against their progress along with the endless chain of vehicles. They were held up at almost every corner. Peachy was fairly beside herself with fear that they would be late. Eddie, huddled near her, was resigned. He even appeared to take a malicious pleasure in their delay. If he missed the ship now, she couldn't say he hadn't tried to make it and honestly failed.

Two blocks away from the Ferry Building they encountered an unusually stubborn traffic jam. They seemed destined to remain in the tie-up forever.

"Turn right and take a side street!" Peachy wailed to the driver.

"Gee, I can't, lady," he faced around to her and yelled. "I can't even get to the next corner."

II

Lieutenant Girard and Al Pearce fidgeted on the almost deserted Howard Street Wharf. Below them two small boats, last of the craft bearing returning sailors to the Fleet, bobbed on the waves. One bore the words U.S.S. New Mexico on its trim sides. The other was from the California.

"I don't understand Briggs at all," growled the Lieutenant. "After the lesson he's had, it seems unbelievable that he should miss his ship. Do you suppose he intends to desert?"

"Maybe he's trying to make up to his girl," said Al.

"There's no time for that now," said Girard. "He ought to be on board. We'll hold the boat here until the last possible minute. If he throws us down this time, I'll never lift a hand to help him again. He'll have to take his medicine."

Even as they spoke, three roars of a siren almost shook the wharf. It was the last warning signal from the California!

Both men looked out over the water toward their ship. They could see the skipper pacing the deck, preparatory to giving orders to weigh anchor. A division was mustered on the forward deck to haul in. From the semaphore tower a sailor was waving signal flags.

"He's trying to get us," said Girard. The officer waved his arms over his head. The sailor in the tower started sending a message. The Lieutenant and Pearce read it and looked at each other soberly.

"It says to get under way," said the Lieutenant. "Well, we did our best. We can't wait for Briggs any longer. Cast off the lines, Pearce."

He stepped nimbly into the swaying boat. Al thoughtfully lifted the mooring lines from the bollards to which they were attached, working as slowly as possible.

A taxi cab shot up to the far end of the dock. Two

figures leaped out, a sailor and a girl. They paused a minute to pay the driver, then arm in arm ran wildly down the wharf.

"It's Eddie, Lieutenant!" yelled Al.

"Hold the boat a minute," Girard commanded the coxswain in charge.

When they saw that they were safe, Peachy and Eddie slackened their oncoming pace. They walked slowly, reluctantly.

"Hurry, Briggs!" shouted the Lieutenant. "We're late now."

The pair had stopped stock still. They were looking into each other's eyes. They embraced. Their lips met in a last fond, long kiss.

"Good bye, Peachy, dear," said Eddie in a voice that was almost a moan.

"Good bye darling," she replied, tears streaming down her face. "Write to me."

"I'll cable the first chance I get," he promised.

Slowly they separated. He turned and dragged his feet down to the end of the dock and almost stumbled into the boat. For a wonder none of the gobs seated in the gunwales guyed or said a word to him. It was all too serious and solemn. His misery was too evident. Girard and Al looked sympathetically at him.

The engine of the launch roared. The lines were cast into the boat. It got under way swiftly. Hands clutched to her throat, tears choking her, Peachy watched him speeding away from her. He turned once or twice and waved gravely. She stood, a forlorn, lone

figure, following the boat as it skipped over the water. The craft whirled around smartly when it had reached the California and slid alongside the companionway. The sailors disembarked, following Lieutenant Girard.

Lines were hooked to the deserted launch and it was hauled up to its davits on the California's deck. Gobs heaved away on the gangway and it was shipped. Orders barked and the anchor chains clanked in the California's hawse pipes. Smoke poured from the funnels of a hundred ships. Whistles and sirens sounded. Decks were a-bustle with activity.

A string of flags ran up smartly on the California's signal mast. Answering flags fluttered from the other ships. The California emitted three deafening blasts. Her bow started swinging to starboard. She turned a half circle and slowly, sedately, majestically, glided down the bay toward the Golden Gate. Other ships fell in line behind her. The Fleet was headed out to sea.

Peachy watched the spectacle with dry eyes now. It was awesome, wonderful. She was proud to think that Eddie was part of it all. It helped to assuage her anguish.

Suddenly she saw a lone sailor climb up the ladder in the high semaphore tower of the flagship. There was already a bluejacket in the tower. He had been sending official messages to the other ships. She had been watching the tower. Eddie had told her that it was his station. Now she seemed to recognize a familiar figure in the newcomer who had swung over

the railing and was facing the shore and waving his flags strenuously. He was signaling somebody there.

Now she knew! It was Eddie and he was sending a message to her!

She looked wildly around for somebody who could interpret it. There had been a sailor on the wharf just a minute before. There he was, just behind her, a gob from the barracks at Mare Island who had been acting as part of the shore patrol during the presence of the Fleet in the harbor. She ran to him, pointing to the signalman in the tower of the California.

"What is he saying?" she cried. "He's a friend of mine. I think he's sending a message to me."

"He'll get a swell bawling out if he is," commented the sailor grimly. He squinted his eyes and looked toward the flagship. The gob in the flagship tower had stopped signaling, but now he had started again. The girl's interpreter read the message word for word.

"Peachy—I—love—you," he transmitted it for her.

"Gee," thrilled Peachy and her tears came afresh. She whipped out her handkerchief and waved it frantically to Eddie. The shore patrol sailor observed her curiously.

"Are you Peachy?" he summoned courage to ask.

"Yes," she smiled.

"He's a lucky guy," he commented politely.

"I'm a lucky girl," she countered.

She continued to wave until the California at the head of the line had disappeared into the haze of the lower bay.

III

It was just a week later.

She was a bright spark of femininity as she walked briskly up Market Street in the clear sunlight of a San Francisco mid-afternoon, having just left the employees' entrance to Schwarz' Mammoth Department Store.

The masculine eyes which swung to her as to a magnet, some with covert approval, others with frank audacity, did not suspect that her happy smile concealed a vast emptiness in her heart.

She seemed quite unconscious of their approval. She was satisfied that afternoon with the fact that one man, the *right* man, loved her, though the shiny, mammoth engines of a battleship were carrying him farther and farther away from her every minute.

A long, low and very bright roadster darted out of the passing uptown traffic and nosed in toward the curb. The languid youth sprawled behind the wheel had been scanning the pedestrians for a block or more. Now he had evidently found the person he was seeking. He attempted to attract the eye of the pretty red headed girl.

"Peachy!" he hailed her and waved her over to him.

She came smiling and stopped alongside the car.

"Hello, Bob," she greeted.

"I dropped by here, hoping you'd be about through work for the day and would be happening along," he explained. Quite an admission for Bob Steele, who

rarely pursued anything. He added an invitation, "Like to take a ride, Peachy?"

"Can't," she replied. "I have a date."

She did not explain to him that she was on her way up Market Street a few blocks to enroll in a stenography course. It would make him laugh.

"I'm going for a swim and to Tait's to supper with the gang later. Like to have you along," he suggested.

"No—thanks a lot, Bob," she said with such an enigmatic smile that he suspected mystery and was curious.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Haven't seen you lately at all. High hatting your old playmates?"

He was half bantering, half in earnest. He had discovered, to his surprise, that he couldn't forget her.

"I'm married, Bob," she said simply.

She might just as well tell him, she thought, and relieve him of any illusions he might have over their future relationship. Trust him not to have read about her in the newspapers. She watched his face. For the first time since she had known him, she saw his eyes open wide in startled surprise and his ready tongue at a loss for words.

Finally, he managed to say, "Married? It's not a gag, is it?"

She shook her head, enjoying his confusion.

"Who's the genius who managed to sell *you* marriage?" he inquired striving to conceal his disappointment and his eagerness for further details.

"You don't know him. You never heard of him.

His name is Briggs—Edward Briggs." Then, with a defiant toss of her red head, "He's a sailor. He sailed a week ago with the fleet."

Bob stared at her.

"A sailor?" he mused thoughtfully. "Well, you said that day when you were telling me what bunk love is, that you would fall for a somebody unexpected. A sailor, hey. Was it a sudden idea?"

"Love at first sight. I don't understand it myself. I was so high and mighty and smart—*you* know—and then suddenly I was just like a kid. But it's real—the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me."

"Imagine," he drawled. "Think it will last?"

"Forever!"

"But you said your—er—husband had sailed," he suggested. "Sailors do that sort of thing, I understand. Nothing to prevent you from partying with the gang if you care to."

"No, thanks," she replied quietly. "I'm not going in for that kind of thing any more. Oh, I like it all right. I'm no stick-in-the-mud. When Eddie gets out of the service and we get settled down, we'll have a good time with the best of them. Along with a lot of hard work, of course. Meantime, I'm going to take it easy and be just a regular wife."

He sighed. He eased off the emergency brake of his car. He hesitated, then actually blushed.

"I may as well tell you," he said slowly. "I wanted very much to see you today because—well—I was going to ask you to marry *me*." He pressed his foot

on the starter of his roadster. He turned his head to her, "Too late now, of course. Probably wouldn't have done any good even if I had been on time. I really love you, Peachy. But don't worry about me. Mother's ducking off for New York and Europe Saturday. I'll run along with her. When I get back, I won't annoy you. I'm no home-breaker. I wish you all the luck in the world. So long."

His powerful greyhound on wheels purred softly and eased away from the curb. He turned, his face white and very serious, and waved to her. Then he slumped down in the seat until just the tip of his gray fedora could be seen from the rear.

Peachy stood watching his car disappear into the traffic. She shook her head in slow wonderment. So love had hit cynical Bob Steele too. Just as love for Eddie had come to her. And both she and Bob had laughed at love for so long!

She turned and walked thoughtfully up the street.

CHAPTER XXIV

Ferry boat whistles sounded a hectic din through the clear, frosty air of a San Francisco afternoon in February. Knots of people scattered on shore from the site of the old Cliff House to the Ferry Building cheered and waved their hands. Even the gulls swooping down out of the blue sky nearly to the sparkling waters of the Bay seemed to be offering a welcome to the stately line of ships steaming down to take up their anchorage in Man o' War Row.

The Fleet was returning!

Signal flags ran aloft. The vessels of all types, from battleship to small auxiliary, maneuvered in unison. Anchor chains rattled. The ships' engines ceased their throbbing. Tenders loaded with mail were lowered to the water and started racing toward the shore.

Another half hour and the larger launches began bearing the happy liberty parties toward their long-awaited haven. The Bay seemed filled with boats laden with smiling bluejackets. The first of the craft slid alongside the Howard Street Wharf and discharged its buoyant cargo. Soon the water around the dock was teeming with activity.

A crowd of civilians had collected. Fond parents, sweethearts, friends and the plain curious. Lips met lips, arms were locked together.

In the front rank of the onlookers stood an eager-eyed and very pretty red headed girl, an elderly looking woman bearing a resemblance to her and a straight-backed, rather good looking gentleman of fifty years or more with iron gray hair and moustache. He was nattily dressed and bore his years easily.

John Briggs had been considerably disturbed when he received the hasty cable from his son breaking the news that the youth had been married just before sailing for Hawaii and the Philippines. The elder Briggs had always been of the opinion that Eddie took women lightly. He could not conceive of the boy entering matrimony in his present state of mind in the serious manner in which that momentous step should be taken. The cable had reached Eddie's father in London. John Briggs had made rather indefinite plans to spend another fortnight in the British capital. But, like most Americans accustomed to a strenuous business life in this country, he was a little tired of idling abroad. He had been abroad long enough anyway. The cable hastened his decision to board a ship for home at once.

After two days in Reno, during which he had disconcertingly discovered that his hotel business seemed to be running even more smoothly without his guiding hand than with it, Mr. Briggs took train for San Francisco. He frankly went for the purpose of meet-

ing Eddie's wife, to see what manner of girl his son had taken unto himself. He rather feared for the worst. The marriage bore all the earmarks of ill considered haste. He knew the type of flashy woman that usually attracted his son. He was convinced that one of them, doubtlessly learning that the youth had a background of money, had set a trap for him.

The Nevada hotel proprietor registered at the Palace and then set out for the Deane apartment without any warning to Peachy or her mother in advance. It was Saturday afternoon and fortunately both women were at home. Introducing himself, Briggs looked at the girl searchingly from under shaggy eyebrows and through keen eyes wrinkled around the corners from long contact with the Nevada desert sun during an early career as mining prospector.

He saw a beautiful girl with striking red hair and very candid blue eyes. She was attired attractively, as girls of all classes seem able to dress themselves today. But John Briggs saw more than that. He was rather a student of character. One had to be in his line of business. He recognized that here was neither a crafty young schemer nor a rattle-brained flirt, either of which he would not have been surprised to find. He analyzed Peachy as a pleasant, level-headed young woman with plenty of personality and character. He almost sighed audibly with relief, and, inwardly rejoiced. Then he turned to her mother, who confirmed his opinion of the daughter.

Eddie's father was easy to make friends with. The

Deanes liked him at once. In half an hour he was sitting down to the evening meal with them. By the time he left late that evening it was as if he had known them all his life. They were his kind of folks. He went back to the Palace Hotel and wrote a long letter to his son congratulating him and telling him emphatically that he had won a much better wife than he deserved. The next evening Peachy and her mother had dinner with Mr. Briggs at the Palace and visited the theatre with him. The three were inseparable during the remainder of the week which Eddie's father spent in San Francisco.

Now, almost six months later, they stood reunited on the Howard Street Wharf, there on an errand of mutual interest and pleasure to all.

"I can't understand why he doesn't come," said Peachy impatiently. "I should think he would be the first man ashore."

"He would be if he could," said Mr. Briggs. "Maybe he has to clean up some matters about getting out of the Navy before he can come."

They did not have to speculate on this for long. A boat load of sailors came hurtling over the waves, swept around two slower craft and slipped gracefully alongside the wharf. A sun-bronzed, curly haired sailor was standing in the bow waving frantically.

"There he is! There he is!" cried Peachy, pulling the two older people after her as she surged toward the end of the dock.

Eddie was the first sailor to leap out of the boat and ashore. He rushed up to Peachy and flung his arms around her. Their lips met ecstatically. Her face was wet with tears.

"Oh, Eddie," she cried, "it's been so long."

"A lifetime," he agreed. "But don't cry, kid. It's all over now. I'm a civilian. I got my discharge papers right here." He slapped his bulging blouse pocket. "The quicker I buy a suit of regular clothes the better."

Eddie turned and kissed Mrs. Deane. Then he sighted the third member of the welcome party and stared in surprise.

"Why, dad," he almost shouted. "I didn't know you'd be here. Gee, this is great!"

The two Briggs exchanged a firm, affectionate handshake.

A tall, angular faced sailor bearing a sea bag and a suitcase stopped alongside Eddie and dropped his burden at the latter's feet.

"Was you goin' to leave these for the sea gulls?" he chaffed Eddie. It was Al Pearce.

"Thanks, Al," Eddie grinned. He turned to Peachy. "I was so excited at seeing you that I forgot my stuff."

Al shook hands with the girl and her mother and ducked off. Eddie was holding Peachy off at arms' length, inspecting her happy face.

"You look great, kid," he decided. "And my wife,

hey? Doesn't that sound good! You all look fine. You're ten years younger, Mother Deane. You too, Dad."

"Still full of blarney, I see," commented his father dryly.

"It took more than blarney to win this young lady," opined Eddie.

"I still don't see how you put it over," declared the older Briggs. He lifted his son's suitcase despite the latter's protest. "Come on. We can't hold up traffic here all day. All hands up to my suite at the Palace."

They piled into a taxi cab. Peachy and Eddie brazenly had their arms around each other in the back seat.

A half hour later Mr. Briggs and Mrs. Deane had tactfully left the young couple to themselves in the sitting room of the former's rather palatial layout of rooms at the hotel. Young husband and wife sat very close to each other on a divan.

"I was glad when you wrote me you had given up the job at the dance hall," commented Eddie when at last they had arrived at the moment when they could talk coherently. "I didn't like the idea of all those other fellows dancing with you all the time."

"It was no job for a home-loving married woman," Peachy agreed, smiling. "I thought I should be doing something more substantial. It was mother who suggested that I study stenography at night. I liked it. When I got through the school and could take a job, I happened to meet Judge Hartley one day in Schwarz'

lunchroom as I wrote you. He was very nice. He asked me what I was doing and I told him. It happened that his own secretary was leaving to get married and he offered me the position. Of course I jumped at it. I left Schwarz' the next week. It's been a great experience with the Judge. It was hard work and at first I wasn't much good to him. All those legal terms, mostly Latin, confused me. But I learned. He's really a peach of a man, Eddie. Very set in his ideas of right and wrong and a bit old fashioned. He thinks modern girls are the limit. But I guess I've changed his mind about that a little. I believe he was really surprised that I could get to work before he did in the morning and tend to business without worrying about looks or clothes or men. It's been an education for both of us."

"But you've graduated from that now, Peachy," announced Eddie. "I'm going to get a job right away and support my wife."

"That'll suit me fine," the redhead agreed gravely. "I'd like nothing better than a little apartment of our own to take care of. You needn't worry about the mother-in-law problem either. I believe we'd both get along with mother fine, but she's too wise to try it. She says that no two women can live together in one house without both trying to run the place at once. As soon as we settle down, she's going to board with my aunt in Berkeley. But how about you, Eddie? Have you any plans about a job?"

He nodded.

"Lieutenant Girard is going to take me around in the morning to his brother, who runs an advertising agency in town here," Eddie announced. "The lieutenant has been in touch with him and it's practically fixed that I'm to start work there as soon as I can duck out of this uniform into shore clothes. I think I'll be keen for advertising. I used to handle it for dad's hotel and I ran the ship's paper. I like to write and I've got a hunch that I might get good at it if I worked. And you bet your life I'll work. It won't be much pay at the start, but we'll get along."

"We sure will," echoed Peachy. "We've got to."

Bob Steele's cynical face flashed into her mind for an instant.

The door opened cautiously and John Briggs appeared, followed by Mrs. Deane.

"You young folks through getting acquainted yet?" asked the Nevadan jovially. "By the way, Eddie, has that young woman told you that I sold out my hotel and am going to become a California native son? Yes, sir. Closed the deal yesterday just before I left. Tom Winslow, my manager, has been the real works back there so long that I decided to clear out entirely and let him take over the property, lock, stock and barrel. At a price, of course. And plenty. Trust your old man for that. But I'm not going to mix my rheumatism with these San Francisco fogs. I'm going to Los Angeles, the city of perpetual warmth and sunshine. But don't tell anybody in this town or they'll lynch me for treason."

"You deserve the rest, dad," commented Eddie. He was relieved for two reasons. He thought it was high time his father gave up the drudgery of a very exacting business. Moreover, he had had secret misgivings that his parent might have been nursing plans to take his son back to Reno and make him his assistant at the hotel.

"Now if you young folks need anything to help get you started with," suggested the beneficent Briggs tentatively, "don't hesitate to ask for it. I've got more than I can ever use myself."

"No, thanks, dad," answered Eddie promptly. "I've practically got a job and I saved a couple of hundred bucks during my last cruise. There was nothing much for a married man aboard ship to spend money for."

"Well, at least you'll take over this little suite here at my expense for a few days till you find a nest to roost in," offered Briggs. "Guess you'll have to. It's paid for a week in advance and I've already gotten a room for myself on another floor of the hotel."

"That's mighty nice of you, dad," Eddie thanked him sincerely.

Peachy beamed her gratitude. Everything seemed too good to be true. Eddie was back, looking huskier and handsomer than ever. Her mother had never been in better health. And Eddie's father was such a dear.

Suddenly she surprised the elder Briggs by throwing her arms around his neck and kissing him affectionately.

"You're altogether too good to us," she said.

"Nothing's too good for you, young lady," returned the older man soberly. "You'll never know what you've done for my boy already. And it's only just begun, I know."

"That's right," Eddie spoke up promptly.

They were all thoughtful and silent for a moment.

"Why all the seriousness all of a sudden?" Mr. Briggs cried in a voice that had a suspicion of a choke in it. "I've got a mighty swell dinner coming up to this room in just five minutes. Then we're all going to that new musical comedy at the Alcazar. This is a celebration. A wedding dinner and party all in one. And I want everybody to put on a big smile. Right?"

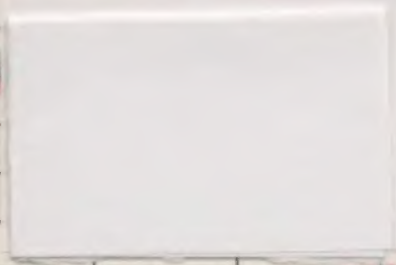
"Right-o!" cried Peachy happily.

"You said it!" chimed Eddie.

THE END

DATE DUE

DUE DATE SUBJECT TO CHANGE
IF A RECALL IS REQUESTED



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